

Alexei Tolstoy

ORDEAL

A Trilogy

Book 3

Bleak Morning

Progress Publishers Moscow



АЛЕКСЕЙ ТОЛСТОЙ

*ХОЖДЕНИЕ
ПО МУКАМ*

Трилогия

Сестры
Восемнадцатый год
Хмурое утро

*

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО · «ПРОГРЕСС» ·

Москва

ALEXEI TOLSTOY

ORDEAL

A Trilogy

THE SISTERS

1918

BLEAK MORNING



Bleak Morning



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АЛЕКСЕЙ ТОЛСТОЙ
ХОЖДЕНИЕ ПО МУКАМ
Трилогия

Книга третья
ХМУРОЕ УТРО

На английском языке



“...TO LIVE AS VICTORS,
OR DIE GLORIOUSLY...”

*Svyatoslav**

T

* I *

here were two figures at the fire—that of a man and a woman. The chill wind from over the top of a gully in the steppe blew at their backs, whistling through the stalks of wheat, which had long shed its grain. The woman tucked her skirt over her feet, and thrust her hands into the sleeves

* Svyatoslav (cir. 942-973)—Prince of the Kiev State, renowned for his fearless courage.

of her coat. The woollen shawl, which fell low over her eyes, allowed nothing to be seen but the straight nose and the stubbornly closed mouth.

It was not much of a fire—just a few handfuls of smouldering dung cakes picked up by the man round the cows' watering place in the gully. And to make matters still worse, the wind was getting stronger.

"It is certainly a great deal easier to appreciate the beauties of nature when listening to the crackling of logs or looking pensively out of the window.... A great deal easier than in this dreary steppe—oh, God, the misery of it!"

It was the man speaking, in low tones which were not without a kind of bitter satisfaction. The woman turned her chin in his direction, but did not open her lips. She was worn out by the long journey on an empty stomach, and by this man, who talked so much and guessed her inmost thoughts so smugly. Tilting her head slightly backward, she gazed from beneath the overhanging shawl at the dim autumnal sunset behind the barely discernible hills—a mere slit in the clouds, casting no light over the lonely steppe.

"Now we'll bake some potatoes, Darya Dmitrevna, to gladden the inner man.... What you would have done without me, I can't imagine."

Bending down, he selected the firmest of the dung cakes from the heap at his side, turning them this way and that in his hand before placing them carefully on the fire. Then he raked the embers a little to make room for some potatoes which he drew from the capacious pockets of his coat. His reddish face with the fleshy nose flattened at the tip, the sparse beard, and the stringy moustache, wore an expression which was either extremely cunning or merely shrewd, and he never stopped smacking his lips.

"I keep thinking about you, Darya Dmitrevna," he said. "There's very little of the savage in you, and your hold on life is weak, even your civilization is only skin-deep, my dear.... You're just a rosy apple—sweet, but not ripe...."

All the time he was poking the potatoes about—potatoes which he had stolen from a vegetable plot in a steppe farmstead they had passed on their way. His fleshy nostrils shining in the heat of the fire, twitched knowingly. His name was Kuzma Kuzmich Nefedov. Dasha was bored to death with his speechifying and mind reading.

Their acquaintance dated only a few days back, in a train running on a fantastic schedule and following a fantastic route, only to be derailed by White Cossacks.

The end carriage, in which Dasha had travelled, had remained on the track, but it had been fired at from a machine gun, and everybody in it had rushed into the steppe, since the custom of those days led the passengers to expect robbery and reprisals.

Kuzma Kuzmich had noticed Dasha in the train, and had for some reason or other taken to her, although she had been far from communicative. And when she found herself in the lonely steppe at dawn, Dasha herself had clung to him. Her situation was desperate: from where the overturned carriages lay at the foot of the embankment came the sound of shots and cries, then flames burst out, and the sombre shadows of the ancient burdock and dry, rime-covered worm-wood bushes, raced over the ground. How was she to find her way in this boundless desert?

Striding beside Dasha towards the deepening green of the dawn, from the direction of which came a smell of smoke from kitchen chimneys, Kuzma Kuzmich rambled on, in some such words as these: "Not only are you afraid, you're unhappy, my beauty, or so it seems to me. Now I, though I have been through many vicissitudes, have never known unhappiness, still less boredom.... I was once a priest, but I was unfrocked for free-thought, and confined in a monastery. And now I wander free as air—the world is my home. Those for whom a warm bed, a well-trimmed lamp, and a shelf full of books on the wall are indispensable to happiness, will never know true happiness.... Such people are always waiting for the morrow to bring happiness, and one fine day there is no morrow, no warm bed. Such a one is for ever bewailing his fate. But I roam the steppe, my nostrils inhale the smell of freshly baked bread—and I know there must be a farmstead over there, and we'll soon hear the dogs barking. Oh, Lord! Just look at the dawn! By my side is a companion of angelic appearance, moaning, evoking my pity, making me feel as frisky as a colt. And who am I? Simply—the happiest of men. I always keep a bag of salt in my pocket. I can always get a few potatoes from a vegetable plot. What more? The vivid world, the arena of passions.... I have thought long, Darya Dmitrevna, about the fate of

our intellectuals. Theirs is not the true Russian spirit, let me tell you. . . . That's why they have been scattered by the wind until—alas!—all that is left of them is a void. While I, an unfrocked priest, play about to my heart's content, and mean to go on doing so for as long as I like."

But for him, Dasha would have been done for. He was never at a loss. When, at sunrise, their roamings brought them to a farmstead, solitary in the naked steppe, not so much as a tree near it, its horse pound empty, the roof over the clay walls of its yard scorched, an angry, grizzled Cossack with a gun confronted them at the well. His light eyes gleaming crazily from beneath drawn brows, he shouted at them to get out. But Kuzma Kuzmich soon managed to get round the old man.

"Go on, Gaffer!" he cried. "Ah, my native land! We have been fleeing from the revolution day and night, with sore feet and parched throats—shoot us, do! We have nowhere to go, anyhow!"

And after all the old man was more pathetic than terrible. His sons had been mobilized in Mamontov's corps, and his two daughters-in-law had left the farmstead for the village. He had not ploughed any land that year. The Reds had passed by and mobilized his only horse. The Whites had passed by and mobilized his poultry. And now he was all alone in his farmstead, with nothing but a crust of mouldy bread and a few ounces of last year's tobacco. . . .

They rested there, and went on at nightfall, heading for Tsaritsyn, from where there might be some hope of getting to the south. They travelled by night, sleeping in the daytime, mostly on last year's straw ricks. Kuzma Kuzmich avoided populated places. Once, looking down from a chalky eminence on the white huts of a village which extended irregularly on either side of an elongated pond, he said:

"Nowadays humanity in the mass may be dangerous, especially for those who do not know what they want. That in itself is incomprehensible and suspicious: not to know what one wants. The Russian is hasty-tempered, self-confident, and prone to overestimate his own strength, Darya Dmitrevna. Set him a task—a task that seems beyond his powers, but is worth while, and he'll bow down before you in gratitude. . . . But just try going down to the village, and see how they'll start asking you questions. And what will you reply,

you intellectual? You'll have to admit that you haven't come to any conclusions whatever, not on a single point...."

"Can't you let me alone?" said Dasha in a low voice.

Although from pride and disinclination she had at first held out, Kuzma Kuzmich had got almost everything out of her: about her father, Dr. Bulavin, her husband, Red Commander Ivan Ilyich Telegin, her sister Katya, "beautiful, kind, high-souled." Once, at the end of a fine day, after a good sleep among the straw, Dasha went down to the river to have a wash. She combed her hair, which had got dishevelled beneath her shawl, had a bite, and in a moment of cheerfulness, found herself, somewhat to her own surprise, volunteering information about herself:

"You see how it all happened.... I couldn't go on living in Samara with my father.... You consider me a parasite. And I have an even lower opinion of myself than you have, you know.... But I simply can't bear the humiliation of feeling myself the lowest of the low...."

"I quite understand," replied Kuzma Kuzmich, smacking his lips.

"No, you don't," said Dasha, narrowing her eyes at the flame. "My husband risked his life just to see me for a moment. He's strong, brave, a man whose decisions are final.... And what am I? Is it worth risking one's life for a vain creature like me? After meeting him that time I beat my head against the window sill. I hated my father.... It was all his fault. Absurd, contemptible man! I decided to go to Ekaterinoslav, to look for my sister Katya—she would have understood, she would have helped me: she's clever, she's as sensitive as a harp string, my Katya! Don't laugh! I want to do the ordinary thing—the magnanimous, necessary thing—that's what I want.... But I don't know what to begin with. Only please don't start haranguing me about the revolution...."

"I wasn't going to harangue you, my dear, I'm listening attentively. You have my heartfelt sympathy."

"Never mind the 'heartfelt'.... Just then the Red Army got to Samara.... The government ran away—it was simply disgusting.... My father tried to make me go with him. Oh, what a row we had! We showed ourselves in our true colours, he and I.... My father sent for gendarmes. 'You'll swing for this, my dear!' he told me. But of course nobody

turned up, they had all gone.... My father rushed out of doors with nothing but his brief case, and I shouted out my last words to him through the window.... No hatred can be so bitter as hatred of one's father! Well, and then, I wrapped my head up in a shawl and lay down on the sofa for a good cry. And then and there I cut myself off from my past...."

And so they trudged on over the steppe, hardly meeting a living soul, past villages and hamlets swept into the vortex of civil war, all unaware of the bloody events raging in the locality as the great Don Cossack army, seventy-five thousand strong, marched for the second time to encircle Tsaritsyn, after the August disasters.

Groping for potatoes among the ashes, Kuzma Kuzmich said:

"If you are very tired, Darya Dmitrevna, we could rest tonight, there's no need to hurry. But we've chosen a bad place for our camp. The wind from the gully would keep us awake. We'd better jog quietly beneath the stars. Oh, how beautiful the world is!" He raised his shrewd red face, as if to make sure that everything was in order in the celestial economy. "Isn't it a miracle of miracles, dearie? Here are two infinitesimal beings creeping over the earth, observing with their inquiring minds a succession of phenomena, each more wonderful than the one before, drawing conclusions which bind them to nothing at all, and satisfying their hunger and thirst without doing the slightest violence to their consciences?... Oh, don't let us be in a hurry to get to the end of our travels!"

He drew a small bag of salt out of his pocket, juggled a potato up and down on his open palm, blew on his fingers, split the potato open and offered it to Dasha.

"I have been through enormous quantities of books, and all they did was to clutter up my mind. The revolution released me from the monastery, which was to me a prison, and flung me out into life pretty roughly. The chief of the Saratov district militia, a very wise man, who kept me under arrest for a fortnight, wrote in the identity card he drew up for me: profession, parasite; education, pseudoscientific; convictions, none. And so, Darya Dmitrevna, when I found myself with nothing but a bag of salt in my pocket, absolutely free, I understood the miracle of life. The useless knowl-

edge cluttering up my mind began to slip away from me, but some of it actually came in handy as exchange value.... For example, to the study of the human hand, or chiromancy, I owe the regular replenishing of my stock of salt."

Dasha was not listening. Something—perhaps it was the wind, whistling with such shrill despairing melancholy in the wheat stubble—made her long to weep, and she kept turning away her face, and gazing at the dim sunset. The thought of the infinite spaces she would have to cover in her search for Ivan Ilyich, for Katya, for her own self, plunged her in despair. Formerly, Dasha would undoubtedly have found a certain satisfaction in pitying herself, so helpless, so small, cast into the cold steppe.... But not now, not any more.... Accepting the potato from Kuzma Kuzmich, she munched at it, washing it down with tears.... She remembered some words from Katya's letter, received so long ago, in Petrograd: "The past has gone—gone for ever, Dasha...."

"Apart from their utter isolation from real life, and aimless bustling, a kind of defiant depravity is one of the vices of our intellectuals, Darya Dmitrevna.... Haven't you ever noticed the way our professional men walk? You must have seen some liberal stamping along as if he were walking on red-hot coals.... 'And where is he hurrying to?' you can't help asking yourself...."

The irritating creature prosed on, boasting and showing off.

"Of course we must go on!" said Dasha, wrapping the shawl still more tightly round her neck. Kuzma Kuzmich looked searchingly at her. Suddenly the pitch dark of the gully was relieved by momentary flashes of light, while loud reports reverberated against its sides....

Hardly had the first shots rung out, when the lonely steppe, above which distant clouds were closing over the strip of sunset, became alive with figures. Dasha, clinging to the ends of her shawl, had not even time to get to her feet. Kuzma Kuzmich began hastily stamping out the fire, but the strong wind fanned the embers into flame, scattering the sparks. The flames revealed men on horseback, bending low in the saddles and whipping up their steeds, as they fled before the shots from the gully.

When they had galloped out of sight everything was quiet again. Everything but Dasha's violently beating heart. Then came shouts from the gully, and the next moment armed men were pouring out of it. Their movements were cautious, and soon their ranks extended over the steppe. One of those nearest to Dasha and her companion turned towards their fire, and shouted in a youthful breaking voice: "Who are you, there?" Kuzma Kuzmich raised his hands above his head, spreading out his fingers with alacrity. A youth in a soldier's greatcoat approached. "What are *you* doing here?" His black-browed, resolute countenance was turned towards the figures at the fire. "Scouts? Whites?" And without waiting for a reply he pushed Kuzma Kuzmich with the butt of his rifle. "Come on, come on, you can tell me on the way...."

"We were only...."

"Only what? Don't you see there's a battle on?"

Kuzma Kuzmich, making no further protest, trudged along beside Dasha, under convoy. They almost had to run to keep up with the rapidly moving detachment. It was quite dark by the time they arrived at some thatched huts where horses were whinnying amidst unharnessed carts at the side of a pond. Somebody called to the detachment to halt, and the soldiers surrounded the speaker, all talking at once:

"We retreated. There was no help for it. They are right on our flanks, the swine.... We ran into a mounted patrol quite near, just by the gully."

"And turned tail like heroes," jeered the man who had called to them to stop. "Where's your commander?"

"Where's the Commander? Hi, Commander! Ivan! Hurry up—the Regimental Commander wants you!"

A tall man with a slight stoop emerged from the shadows.

"All is in order, Comrade Regimental Commander, no losses."

"Post sentries, detail an outpost, get your men fed, show no lights, and then come to my hut."

The men dispersed. The farmstead seemed to be abandoned, and there was nothing to be heard but low-voiced commands and the challenges of the sentries in the darkness. And then even these sounds died down. The wind rustled the straw on the roof, and moaned in the bare branches of the willow on the bank of the pond. The Red Army man who had found Kuzma Kuzmich and Dasha approached

them. His face showed lean, pale, blackbrowed, in the light of the stars twinkling over the farmstead. Looking at him attentively Dasha felt sure he was really a girl. "Follow me," he said, and led them into the hut. "Wait in the entry, you can sit down somewhere."

He opened the door and went in, closing it behind him. From inside could be heard the gruff voice of the detachment commander. It went on so long and so monotonously that Dasha let her head fall on Kuzma Kuzmich's shoulder. "Never mind—it'll all come right," he whispered. The door opened, and the Red Army man came out, groping for the seated figures. "Follow me," he said again, and stepping before them into the yard he began looking for somewhere to lock up the prisoners. He pointed to a low barn with an overhanging thatch, the door of which had been wrenched from its hinges. Dasha and Kuzma Kuzmich went into it, and the Red Army man seated himself on the high threshold, never letting go of his rifle. There was a smell of flour and mice in the barn.

Dasha asked, trying to choke back her desperation:

"May I sit beside you? I'm afraid of mice."

He made room for her reluctantly, and she sat down beside him on the threshold. Suddenly he yawned unrestrainedly, as children do, and looked askance at Dasha.

"So you're spies, eh?"

"Listen, Comrade," said Kuzma Kuzmich, moving toward him in the darkness, "permit me to explain. . . ."

"You can explain later. . . ."

"We're peaceful citizens, refugees. . . ."

"Peaceful! What d'you mean, 'peaceful'? Where did you find your peace, I wonder!"

Leaning the back of her head against the doorjamb, Dasha glanced at the black-browed, handsome face, with the delicately tiptilted nose, the small, pouting mouth, the childlike chin. Suddenly she asked:

"What's your name?"

"That has nothing to do with the case."

"Are you a woman?"

"It won't help you if I am."

The conversation would seem to have come to an end, but Dasha could not take her eyes off that lovely countenance.

"Why do you speak to me as if I were an enemy?" she

asked softly. "You know nothing about me. Why should you assume that I am an enemy? I'm just a Russian woman like yourself.... The only difference is that I've probably gone through more than you have...."

"Russian! What d'you mean 'Russian'? You're a bourgeois," said the Red Army man, stammering slightly, and frowning to make up for it.

Dasha's lips parted. With her usual impulsiveness, she moved closer and kissed him on his hot, roughened cheek. The Red Army man had not expected this ... he blinked at Dasha, his eyelashes fluttering, ... Getting up, he seized his rifle, slung its strap over one shoulder, and retreated a step.

"None of that!" he said threateningly. "That won't help you, citizeness."

"What will help me-*what*?" Dasha exclaimed passionately. "You've discovered what to do, but I haven't.... I ran away from that life like mad. Ran to find my own happiness.... I envy you.... I want to wear a soldier's greatcoat, too."

In her excitement she threw off her shawl, squeezing the corners of it in her clenched fists with all her might.

"For you everything's clear and simple.... What are you fighting for? For a woman to be able to look up at the stars without tears in her eyes.... That's the happiness I want, too...."

The Red Army man let her run on without attempting to stop her, embarrassed by the incomprehensible flood of passionate emotion. Just then the company commander came out of the hut.

"Come on, Agrippina, bring the parasites in!"

The regimental commander and the company commander, in military greatcoats and peaked caps, sat with their elbows on the table in front of an oil dip in a broken earthenware crock. The regimental commander, whose shining eyes were set wide apart, sat sucking at his pipe; the toughened skin on the face of the other was like bark. Dasha and Kuzma Kuzmich stood in the doorway, till ordered by the company commander to come nearer.

"What were you doing in the regimental area?"

He looked neither right nor left, but straight into their eyes. Dasha, who felt suddenly faint beneath this gaze, whispered with parched lips:

"He'll tell you. May I sit down?"

She sat down, holding on to the edge of the bench, and watching the flame floating in the earthenware crock. Kuzma Kuzmich, smacking his lips, shifting from foot to foot, began relating how he had found Darya Dmitrevna in the steppe, and how they were going to the Don, discoursing on lofty matters as they went. He dwelt in detail on this aspect of their journeyings, pouring out his words in a rapid stream, as if fearing interruption. But the commanders sat stock-still at the table, like two rocks.

"It's a great thing, Citizen Commanders, to be able to reason in terms of the general. By this I mean that I am grateful to the revolution for parting us from dreary trivialities. Man, the equal of the gods, born for the performance of sublime tasks, man, who should, like Orpheus with his lute, be giving life to stones and taming the fury of wild beasts, was soiling banknotes and his own mind, by the light of a smoking wick, in the search for ways of outwitting his neighbour.... Thank you for breaking up our wretched life—may its memory be accursed!—there are no more banknotes to soil now, so whether you like it or not you have to turn to high matters.... Here's the guarantee of my sincerity...." (He drew out the bag of salt.) "This is my only possession, I need nothing more, all the rest I can beg or steal. But, Citizen Commanders, I have a bone to pick with you.... You are fighting for the sake of man's happiness, but are apt to forget man himself, he gets left out. Do not separate the revolution from man, do not make just another philosophical system of it, for philosophy is but smoke, it assumes exquisite shapes which vanish into thin air.... Therein lies the explanation of my interest in the fate of this woman: in her I turn over the leaves of an absorbing and poetic tale, such a tale, as, by the way, is to be found in every human being, when approached with true curiosity, with the thirst for knowledge.... Why, it is the universe itself parading in a ragged cloak and worn boots...."

"A good yarn," said the regimental commander, emitting a puff of smoke, but the company commander only said: "Come on, now, show us your papers."

Taking their passports from Dasha and Kuzma Kuzmich, the company commander moved the light nearer to himself and bent low over them, carefully turning the pages of the

booklets with a moistened thumb. The regimental commander sighed heavily every now and then, sucking at the charred pipe which he had hardly removed from his mouth all through the five years of war.

"Who's your father?" the company commander asked Dasha.

"Dr. Bulavin."

"What—the minister of the former Samara government?"

"Yes."

The company commander glanced at the regimental commander and handed him Dasha's passport. Then he asked Kuzma Kuzmich, frowning:

"And you—are you one of the long-haired tribe?"

Kuzma Kuzmich, as if he had long been awaiting this question, shuffled his torn boots in his delight:

"Twice expelled from the seminary—for pollution of food and for making up blasphemous jingles. My father was a Saratov parish priest—I was thrashed within an inch of my life twice by the paternal hand. The rest of my service record is to be found in my passport. . . ."

The company commander who seemed not to be listening to him cast a sidelong glance at Dasha.

"Yours is a serious case. . . . You'd better tell us the whole truth." He grimaced and cleared his throat as he turned over the pages of the passport. "That is the only thing that can save you. Yes—a serious case."

Dasha gazed at him in silence with wide-open eyes. Suddenly Agrippina, who had been standing before the door all the time, said stubbornly:

"She can be trusted, Ivan! I've been talking to her. . . ."

The company commander, lifting his big nose, looked steadily at Agrippina. The regimental commander chuckled. Kuzma Kuzmich, red-faced and merry as ever, gave a series of rapid nods. The company commander said slowly:

"Where are we—sitting round the stove, gossiping?" (The regimental commander's curly moustache shot up, he narrowed his eyes.) "Red Army man Chebrets, on what grounds are you interfering in the interrogation?"

Agrippina fairly choked with rage: obviously, but for the presence of the regimental commander she would have answered the company commander back like any village virago. But he boomed out:

"Red Army man Chebrets, go outside."

Agrippina's dark eyes flashed, and she banged on the floor with the butt of her rifle, but she went out of the hut, compressing her lips. The company commander sniffed and began feeling in his pocket for tobacco.

"So you've managed to get in some agitation, even here!"

Her head bowed, Dasha replied:

"I ask you to believe me. If you don't, it's no use my telling you anything. My father, Dr. Bulavin, is your enemy, but he's my enemy, too.... He wanted to have me hanged, so I ran away from Samara...."

The company commander spread his great hands before him in a gesture of bewilderment.

"How can I believe you, citizeness, if you insist on telling me fairy tales?"

At this the regimental commander removed the pipe from his mouth, wiped the stem against his sleeve and said gravely:

"Keep cool, Gora, perhaps she's telling the truth.... Is your name Telegin?" (From Dasha an almost inaudible: "Yes.") "Can you tell us the name and patronymic of your husband?"

"Ivan Ilyich."

"Second captain in the tsarist army?"

"I think so... yes."

"Was company commander in the Eleventh Red Army?"

"Do you know him?"

Dasha flung herself against the edge of the table, her cheeks flaming; a minute before she had been wan and listless, but now she blossomed out like an opening flower.

"The last time I saw Ivan he was escaping over a roof under fire.... It was like this...."

"Sit down, calm yourself," said the regimental commander. "I know Ivan Ilyich, I was at the front with him, we escaped from a German prisoner-of-war camp together. My name's Melshin, Pyotr Nikolayevich, perhaps he told you about me. They know him well in the Red Army, too." He turned to the company commander. "Your wife is sharper than you, it seems." Then, to Dasha: "Have a rest now—we'll talk tomorrow. You can stay here. Go out that way, there's a kitchen the other side of the entry. Sleep well!"

Dasha, followed by Kuzma Kuzmich, whom the commanders seemed to have quite forgotten about, went through

the entry into the warm, deserted kitchen. Kuzma Kuzmich advised Dasha to get on to the stove ledge. "You can warm your bones, and make up for a whole week of sleeplessness. I'll help you up, dearie. . . ."

Dasha clambered up on the ledge with difficulty, unwound her shawl, placed it under her cheek, covered herself with her coat, and drew up her legs. It was very cosy there, with a comforting odour of warmed bricks and dough. The cricket, immemorial haunter of country hearths, gave his insistent chirp-chirp. . . . At first it kept Dasha awake—whenever the film of sleep closed around her the cricket's chirp-chirp punctured it, as if stitching it all over with grey filaments.

At times she thought it was the noise of a metronome, and that she was sitting at the piano, her hands hanging limp at her sides. Her heart beat in wild suspense, but it was not the steps of her dear one, her beloved that she heard—only the chirp-chirp of the cricket again, only its insistent stitch-stitch. . . .

"What peace, what peace!" reiterated an inner voice. "You have come back to your native land, my poor Dasha. . . . But you have never known your native land, Dasha, oh, Dasha! . . . Do leave me alone! It's only the conductor tapping on the stand with his ivory baton, the music will begin in a minute. . . ." And once again—chirp, chirp. . . .

Kuzma Kuzmich could not get to sleep at first, either. He settled down on the bench beside the stove, smacking his lips and muttering:

"They believed us, they believed us. . . . The pure of heart. . . In their place I wouldn't have believed so easily. . . . Why? One doesn't know oneself—man is an enigma. They believed us—the strong are always simple. . . . That's where their strength lies. Now we have passports—they trusted us. Well then—are brains needed? Can the revolution use a man with brains? It can? Well then—here I am. . . . Darya Dmitrevna, I ask you, can the revolution use a man with brains?"

* II *

Ivan Ilyich Telegin was given a new appointment after the military operations at Samara.

The 10th Red Army emerged from the August fighting at Tsaritsyn with its already meagre stock of munitions greatly

depleted. The Supreme Military Council of the Republic responded with the utmost delay and reluctance to requests from Tsaritsyn for supplies with which to beat back the Don Army's inevitable offensive. But there was a very active man, an old comrade-in-arms of Army Commander Voroshilov, in Moscow now, sent there with the special task of discovering and combating the cause of the delay and the shilly-shallying in the supply departments of the Supreme Military Council. And he really did manage to have a certain amount of supplies sent to the Tsaritsyn front.

Ivan Ilyich got the order to go to Nizhni, to have crates of munition and two guns loaded on a steam tug, and accompany them to Tsaritsyn. Again he found himself floating down the lazy, boundless, mighty, deserted Volga, as once before, this summer, and as in that other summer so many years ago. The paddles of the low, brown tug slapped against the still water. A long way ahead, the shore seemed to be barring the way, as if the river were continually coming to an end, but round each turn new reaches opened out, deep and transparent in the autumn sunlight. Although at this time the Volga was cleared of Whites, the tug kept as far as possible from the banks whenever the weather-beaten logs of some big village hove into sight over the brow of a cliff, or a belfry—convenient position for a machine gun—showed itself through the golden foliage above a bare height.

Ten Baltic sailors sat talking and laughing beside the gun in the stern. Ivan Ilyich himself liked lying there on his side, exclaiming at their yarns, or laughing till the tears came into his eyes. He was a guileless, credulous listener, just the sort appreciated by sailors, who love an open-mouthed audience.

Every day the youngest of the sailors, Young Communist Sharigin, tall and dignified, went up to the ship's bell and gave the summons for all-hands-on-deck. The sailors sat round in a circle; the engineer, an old man, said to have lost quite a lot of money owing to the revolution, clambered out of the hatch; the stoker, an unfriendly, embittered man, stood half in, half out of it, and the woman cook came out of the galley, wiping her hands on her apron. Sharigin would seat himself on a coil of rope, and embark upon an educational talk in a self-confident voice. He was too young to have read much, but he had grasped the main point. Dark

curls showed beneath his sailor's cap, and he had fine, light-grey eyes, but the little snub nose, which seemed to belong to quite a different face, spoilt the general effect.

His task was no easy one. The sailors' conception of the revolution was that of men long separated from their farms, from the wearisome plough, from the fisherman's boat on the Northern coast. They had been hardened by the austerities of life at sea, and when the hour struck, they flung their officers overboard and hoisted the flag of world revolution. They knew what the world was—they had been all round it, and its vastness was not beyond their conception. Formerly all a sailor's possessions were contained in his sea chest. Now, even the sea chest was gone, and the entire property of the sailor consisted of a rifle, a machine-gun belt, and—the wide world.... If these had been the times of Stepan Razin, every man of them, a red-crowned cap tilted over one ear, would have roamed the wide world, free as air, leaving in his wake the glow of fires on the horizon.... "Hey! You bondsmen of the tsar, you serfs of the boyards, you drunken beggars, come! Divide the land, share the gold—all is yours! Live and rejoice!" But the proletarian revolution presented them with an infinitely more complex program, and checked the spontaneous expression of feeling.

"Revolution, Comrades, is a science," Sharigin told them in his confident voice. "However wise you are, you're bound to fall into error, unless you master this science. And what is error? Better murder your father and mother than fall into error! Error leads you to the bourgeois point of view, as the bait lures a mouse to the trap—and once trapped you can just sit there and gnash your teeth—all your services go for nothing, you have become—an enemy. . . ."

The sailors saw nothing to object to in this: without science you can't even steer a ship, much less cope with diabolical counterrevolution. But one of their number, powerful tattooed arms embracing his knees, might put an occasional question, such as:

"Very well—but answer this: you can't so much as fix a stove in a bathhouse unless you have the knack—a woman can't mix dough without it. Do you have to have talent?"

"Look where Latugin is heading for, Comrades! Talent is an inborn quality—talent is a dangerous thing. It can lead a man to bourgeois anarchism, to individualism. . . ."

"There he goes!" said Latugin, waving his hand impatiently. "Chew those words well, then swallow them, then digest them thoroughly, before using them!"

And from the hatch the stoker exclaimed morosely:

"Talent! Talent! Paints his nails, wears bell-bottom trousers and a chain round his neck. . . . We know your lot. . . . Talent!"

Then there would rise an indignant hubbub among the sailors. The stoker, grumbling hoarsely that he would like to see "some people sweat ten years in the stokehole," moved out of harm's way into the engine room. Sharigin, while maintaining the strictest impartiality, tried to pour oil on the troubled waters. "It's true," he said, "that there are among us comrades who paint their nails, but these are just ballast. They will come to a bad end. And there are others who are tainted with S.R. infection. But the great mass of our seamen are giving themselves wholeheartedly to the service of the revolution. We must forget about talent—subordinate it to our own ends. There'll be plenty of fun later for those who survive. I don't count on this, myself."

Sharigin shook his curls. For a few moments the only sound was the murmuring of the water against the stern. The austere words made a good impression on the listeners. Russians have a weakness for anything that raises them above the dead level of monotony—if you go on a spree, then rejoice to the utmost, heedless of the consequences; if you fight—then fight furiously, without a backward glance. It is in humdrum uneventful times, when everything is cloaked in an unintermittent drizzle of rain, that men fear death. In the heat of battle for a great cause, death merely stiffens resistance—the Russian feels no fear so long as the blood runs free in his veins, as it does when he is in holiday mood. And if he is laid low by an enemy bullet, or run through by his gleaming blade—that is fate. It means he has stumbled, has flung out his limbs on the vast steppe, intoxicated for all time with the headiest wine of all.

The sailors liked Sharigin for saying he did not count on coming through alive. For this they forgave him his high-flown speech, his youthful self-assurance—even his turned-up nose seemed just right. He told them about the grain monopoly, the class struggle in the countryside, the world revolution. The grizzled engineer, half-closing his eyes, and clasp-

ing his hands over his stomach, nodded approvingly, especially when Sharigin, losing the thread of his discourse, had resort to vague high-flown expressions. Anisya Nazarova, the cook, taken on board on the previous cruise, in Astrakhan, never sat with the men, but stood a little apart, gazing at the retreating banks. She had a round forehead, and wore her abundant ash-blond hair coiled in braids around her head. Her youthful countenance, haggard with grief, expressed stoical indifference, but there was an occasional spasmodic movement in her throat, as if she were trying to swallow a lump.

Telegin also took part in these talks—discussing strategic problems with the men and chalking the position of the various fronts on the deck.

"The counterrevolution, Comrades, is developing according to a unified plan: to surround Central Russia, to cut it off from the supplies of grain and fuel, and to crush it. Counterrevolution always begins in outlying districts, on rich, fertile soil. In the Kuban, for example, there are a million and a half Cossacks, and as many peasants renting farms. And they are sworn foes—with them, it's a fight to the death. Denikin, who knows that very well, has based his strategy on it—rushing boldly into the fray with a handful of Volunteer officers, he routed the army, one hundred thousand strong, of that scoundrel Sorokin, who should have been shot at the start, for anarchy and for his unbridled treacherous impulses. And now Denikin is creating a strong rear for himself, by aiding the Cossacks to cut up the Reds in the Kuban. Denikin is a shrewd and dangerous foe."

The seamen looked at Telegin, their nostrils quivering, the blue veins swelling beneath their tanned skins. And the engineer kept on nodding his head and muttering: "Right! Right!"

"The task of the ataman Krasnov is much more narrowly defined—for it is hard to get Cossacks to fight outside the Don district. You know the saying: *the Cossack eats well, and sleeps well, and that's why he looks well*. It is when he is defending his own hut that the Cossack is at his most valiant. And yet Krasnov's counterrevolution is just now the most dangerous of all for us. If we are driven out of the Volga districts and lose Tsaritsyn, Krasnov and Denikin will

be able to join up with all the Siberian counterrevolutionary forces. Fortunately for us, there is not complete agreement between Krasnov and Denikin. The Don Cossacks call the Volunteers 'strolling musicians,' and the Volunteers call the Don Army 'German harlots'.... But we mustn't let that console us. We must meet the counterrevolutionary plan with a great plan of our own, and this means, first and foremost, the proper organization of the Red Army, and not just roving guerilla warfare."

Sharigin, with a jealous glance at Telegin, put in:

"That's all quite true.... And so, Comrades, we return to what I began with.... What is revolutionary discipline?"

During one of these discussions, Anisya Nazarova, suddenly stretching one hand in front of her as if she were blind, began speaking in level tones, which were, however, so impressive that all turned towards her and began to listen:

"Excuse me, Comrades, for interrupting," she said. "This is what I want to tell you...."

And this is Anisya's story: early one morning, almost before daybreak, Anisya Nazarova went out to milk the cow. But just as she was opening the door of the warm byre, where Burenka was mooing anxiously in the darkness, she heard the sound of shots from the steppe. She set down the pail, and settled her shawl over her head. Her heart was racing, and her knees began to give as she went towards the wicket gate, but she managed to get it open. People were running down the street after a machine-gun cart, jumping into it while it was moving. The shots, which seemed to come from the steppe and the village pond, and from both ends of the broad street, were getting nearer and more frequent. The cart, crammed with comrades from the village Soviet, could not get away in time, and was soon surrounded by men on horseback. Like a pack of dogs attacking a strange dog, the horsemen circled madly around the cart, shooting and laying about them with their swords.

Anisya closed the gate, crossed herself and was just going to go back for her pail, when she remembered, with a gasp of horror, her sleeping children—Petrusha and Anyuta—and rushed back to the hut. Stroking their hair and whispering in their ears, she roused them, dressed them, and took them into the yard behind the cowbyre, where there was a heap of dried dung cakes, piled up like an anthill, only hollow.

Anisya removed a few cakes of dung and told the children to get inside the heap, and sit there as quiet as mice.

The whole street now resounded with the thudding of hoofs, with shouts and cries, and with the clash of arms. Then a rifle butt was banged on the big gate to the yard and shouts of: "Open!" were heard. As soon as Anisya got the gate open she was seized by two Cossacks, flushed with drink. "Where's Senka Nazarov, where's your husband? Tell us, or we'll kill you where you stand!" Anisya's husband was not a Cossack, he was a newcomer to the village, a Red Army man, and Anisya did not know whether he was dead or alive. She told them she did not know where her husband was—some strange men had come and taken him away in the summer. Relinquishing their rough hold on her, the Cossacks went into the hut, where they turned everything upside down and broke what they could. Then they came out again and seized Anisya, dragging her with them to the village Soviet, formerly the abode of the ataman.

The sun was high by now, but all shutters and gates were tightly closed, as if the villagers were still asleep. The only sign of life was in front of the Soviet, where the Cossacks were whirling about on horseback, and men on foot arrived constantly, leading peasants and Cossacks, tightly bound, some of them covered with blood. Later it was discovered that a black list had been made and all who had voted in the spring for the Soviet Power, seized.

In the ataman's hut was an officer with a badge showing a skull and crossbones sewn on to his sleeve. And beside him was the notorious Cornet Zmiev, who had run away from the village six months before. Everyone had forgotten about him, and now there he was, with his drooping moustache—plump, burly, red-faced. At the moment when Anisya was propelled into the hut, Zmiev was shouting at the fifty or so prisoners under guard.

"Well, you Red swine, what has the Soviet Power done for you? Come on, now, tell us what the Moscow commissars taught you. . . ."

The officer, glancing at the list, was interrogating in low tones each prisoner pushed up to the table.

"You admit that this is your name and surname? Good. Are you a sympathizer of the Bolsheviks? No? Did you vote for them in May? No? So you're a liar. Flog him. Next—

Cossack Rodionov." And the officer raised pale, goatlike orbs: "Stand at attention! Look at me! Were you a delegate to the Peasants' Congress? No? Did you make propaganda for the Soviets? Again no! So you lie to the court-martial. Left turn! Next. . . ."

The Cossacks seized the men as they were dismissed, knocking them off the porch steps on to the ground, and pulling down their breeches; one man sat on the struggling legs, another held the head between his knees, and two others, tearing the ramrods out of their rifles, beat the prostrate form, raising their arms high, so that the rods whistled through the air.

The officer could hardly make himself heard, so deafening had the wails and shrieks of the victims become. Crowding around the place of chastisement were men on horseback and on foot, and those local Cossacks who had rushed out of their huts to meet the detachment with shouts of: "Christ is risen!", and now shouted and swore: "Beat them, beat them, till there's not a scrap of flesh left on their bones! Beat them to the last drop of blood! That'll teach them to suck up to the Soviets!"

At last there was nobody left in the ataman's hut but Anisya and a young schoolmistress. She had come to the village of her own accord, and was always trying to educate the villagers, gathering the women together and reading Pushkin and Leo Tolstoy to them, catching beetles with the children—*beetles* in times like these!

Zmiev shouted at her:

"Stand up—slut of a Jew!"

The schoolmistress stood up, her lips trembling soundlessly, before she could get out:

"I am not a Jewess, you know that very well, Zmiev. . . . And if I were—it's no crime. . . ."

"How long have you been a member of the Communist Party?" asked the officer.

"I am not a Communist. I love children, and consider it my duty to teach them. Fancy—ninety per cent of the villagers can neither read nor write!"

"I can fancy it very well," said the officer. "And now we are going to whip you."

She turned pale, and fell back a step. The Cornet roared at her: "Undress!" Her pretty face twitched and she began

unbuttoning and taking off her checked coat, as in a dream. . . .

"Listen, listen!" She made a gesture of incredulous horror, as if to ward him off. "You can't, you can't. . . ."

From outside came excruciating, frenzied wails. But the Cornet only reiterated: "Take off your drawers, hussy!"

"You scoundrel!" cried the teacher, her eyes burning, and her face flushing an angry red. "Shoot me, you beasts, you monsters . . . this will cost you dear. . . ."

At this, Zmiev seized her, lifted her off her feet and flung her on the floor. Two Cossacks pulled up her skirt, holding her feet and her head as in a vice, while the officer rose from behind the table with unhurried movements, and took a whip from a Cossack, a smile creeping over his pasty face. Flourishing the whip, he brought the lash down violently on the girl's exposed buttocks. The Cornet, leaning forward in his chair, cried: "One!" The officer went on whipping without haste, the girl was silent. . . . "Twenty-five, that'll do for you!" he said, flinging the whip aside. "Now go and complain to the district ataman!" She lay there as if dead.

The Cossacks picked her up and carried her into the entry. Anisya's turn had now come. The officer, tightening his Caucasian belt, merely jerked his chin in the direction of the door. Anisya, half-crazed with hate, tried to escape, and when the Cossacks started to drag her out of the hut, she tore at their hair, bit their hands, and lunged out at them with her knees. Then, tearing herself away, her head uncovered, her clothes in tatters, she sprang at her captors, fighting till stunned by a blow on the head. They took the skin off her back with ramrods and threw her down in front of the porch—probably believing that the plaguey bitch was dead.

Captain Nemshaev's punitive detachment restored order in the village, appointed an ataman, loaded a few carts with loaves, lard and some odds and ends of property, and took their departure. Silence reigned over the village all day—the stoves were not heated, the cattle not taken out of the barns. And that night some of the non-Cossack farmsteads caught fire, among them, Anisya's.

The neighbours were afraid to put out the fire, for the moment the first flames showed themselves at one end of the village, Cossacks were seen galloping up, and shots were heard. Anisya's farmstead burned to a mere heap of ashes.

The neighbours only remembered the children the next morning. Anisya's little boy and girl, Petrusha and Anyuta, who had crouched all night under the dung cakes, Anisya's cow, her sheep, her poultry—all were burned to death.

Kind souls picked up Anisya as she lay moaning and unconscious in front of the ataman's porch, took her into their hut, and nursed her back to health. When, a few weeks later, she came to herself, they told her about her children. Then she told her kind neighbours that there was nothing to keep her in the village any more. It was autumn by now. She had no tidings of her husband, and nothing to live for. She went away, roaming from village to village, begging at windows. She got as far as the railway line and at last reached Astrakhan, where she was taken on as ship's cook, the former cook having gone ashore after the last cruise and not come back.

Such was the incident from her own life which Anisya Nazarova told them.

"Thank you, Comrades," she said, when she had done. "Now you know my grief . . . thank you for listening to me. . . ."

And wiping her eyes on her apron, she went back to the galley. The sailors sat in frowning silence for a long time, their sinewy arms embracing their knees. Ivan Ilyich went a little way away and lay down by himself. Suppressing a sigh, he said to himself: "There now! One meets a person, one passes by, and never notices that one has been brought face to face with the smoking ruins of what was once a whole world. . . ."

But the impression made on him by this woman's story gradually merged with thoughts of his own sorrows, which he kept hidden from all, from himself first and foremost. He had very little hope of ever seeing Dasha again. Human beings had great powers of endurance, of course—no other animal could survive such wounds, such disasters. But the distances were so enormous! Where was he now to look for Dasha among the millions streaming eastward? Why, that old fool, Dr. Bulavin, might even have whisked her abroad with him!

Shaking his head, and breathing a sigh of pity, he thought of Dasha's love of refinement and elegance, her nature, at once cold and ardent, like champagne on ice.

"It was too much for her, too much. . . . A hothouse plant, how was she to weather the chill winds of the tempest shaking the world? Poor little thing, she broke down utterly that

time in Petrograd, after the death of her child, her feeble flame flickering and sinking in the chill twilight."

All Ivan Ilyich knew of her adventures since he had left her in Petrograd, he had gleaned from the hastily scanned letter in Samara. Dasha must have gone through a great deal since then, must have learned much. . . . How passionately she had dragged him to the window, to save him from his pursuers! "I will be faithful to you! Run, run!"

Ivan Ilyich could not forget—would never be able to forget—the fragrance of her fine blond hair as she clung to him. Strange, wonderful, beloved woman. . . . Ah, well, enough of reminiscences. . . .

The weather was beginning to break up. The Volga grew dark; clouds, cold and dreary, piled up in the north; the wind whistled through the low masts. The steamer passed Kamishin, a remote townlet of wooden houses and leafless orchards on bare slopes. The Tsaritsyn front began immediately after Kamishin.

* III *

Clouds laden with an icy chill were creeping across the sky, over Tsaritsyn, and the storms of dust raised by the wind were settling in eddies on the haphazard huddle of miserable wooden dwellings straggling amidst privies and factories, along the top of the high, crumbling bank. Telegin did not meet a soul as he went up the steep street, on which the cobblestones had been loosened in their sockets by the torrential rain. The creaking landing stage and the dockside were equally deserted. It was not till he got to the town square, where the vast grey bulk of the cathedral-church loomed through a veil of dust, that he met with an armed detachment. They trudged on, young and old, clad in a strange medley of garments, their heads turned away from the wind in stunned persistence.

In front strode a gaunt, fierce-looking old woman, wearing a Red Army cap and, like the rest of them, shouldering a rifle. When he came abreast of her, Ivan Ilyich asked her the way to headquarters. But for all reply she looked at him savagely, and the detachment hurried past him, their feet sending up clouds of dust.

Ivan Ilyich had to report the arrival of the tug at army headquarters, and hand in the bill of lading. But he had no idea where to look for headquarters. All around were boarded-up shops, windows offering no sign of life, and rattling signs which looked as if they were ready to fall at any minute. And suddenly he almost ran into a military man with his arm in a sling, who uttered a low-voiced curse, and gave a hiss of pain through clenched teeth. Ivan Ilyich apologized and asked where army headquarters was. Only then did he realize that this was Sapozhkov, Sergei Sergeyevich, his former regimental commander.

"Hi, what are you doing, rushing about like a madman?" said Sapozhkov. "Well—how are you?"

Seeing that Ivan Ilyich was going to embrace him, Sapozhkov drew back, exclaiming: "Cut it out! Keep still, can't you? Where have you sprung from?"

"I've brought a steamer here."

"And he's still alive, the nut! And he looks bursting with health! Oh, the Russians! What a breed! You want headquarters? Well, here it is! Where are you staying? Nowhere, I suppose. All right, I'll wait for you here."

Accompanying Telegin into the porch of a solid-looking merchant's house, he showed him the way to headquarters, the offices of which were on the second floor.

"I'll be waiting for you, Ivan, don't forget!"

Ivan Ilyich had been in the headquarters of Sorokin, and of the armies at the southern front—places where one could never find the room one needed, where everyone seemed to be in a conspiracy to lie, where everything was enveloped in clouds of tobacco smoke, with typists rattling away like mad, and supercilious aides, in extravagantly-cut riding breeches flitting in and out continually. But here stillness reigned, and Telegin found the room he was looking for instantly. An orderly-officer was sitting at a window almost too dusty to admit a ray of light. He raised a gaunt, fever-stricken countenance, and fixed an unblinking gaze upon Telegin from beneath inflamed eyelids.

"There's nobody here—everyone is at the front," he said.

"Couldn't you put me through to the Commander? I have an urgently-needed consignment to deliver."

The officer rose with the trancelike ease of one almost light-headed from lack of sleep, and looked out of the window. An automobile had just driven up.

"Just a minute," he said quietly, and went on sorting letters and reports, many of which consisted in pencilled scrawls so illegible that they conveyed nothing but the sublime simplicity and courageous souls of the writers.

Two men entered. One wore an Astrakhan coat, with field glasses hanging over it in front and a heavy cavalry sword suspended from a raw-hide belt. The other, who had on a long soldier's greatcoat and a lined cap with earpieces, like those worn by Petrograd workers, carried no arms. The faces of both were dark with dust. The officer on duty said:

"The direct wire to Moscow has been repaired."

The one in the Astrakhan coat, who had a youthful air, and round, merry brown eyes, stopped short.

"That's good news!" he exclaimed.

The other, whose greatcoat was splashed with mud, pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his lean face, trying to get the dust out of his black moustache, and Telegin was aware of a pair of bright eyes gazing attentively at him from over slightly raised lower lids.

"This comrade has brought a report," said the officer.

Ivan Ilyich, who had never seen either of these men before, and had no means of knowing who they were, hesitated for a moment. The officer of the day turned to him:

"You can speak, Comrade—it's the Military Council of the front."

Telegin drew out his papers and made his report. On learning that a steamer carrying munitions had arrived, the newcomers exchanged glances. The man in the greatcoat took the bill of lading, while the other, looking over his shoulder, ran his eyes down it eagerly, his small mouth opening and shutting unconsciously as he read the figures showing the amount of cartridges, shells, and machine-gun belts....

"How many men did you bring?" asked the man in the greatcoat.

"Ten Baltic sailors and two guns."

Again the swift exchange of glances.

"Fill up a blank," said the man in the greatcoat. "At seventeen hours you and the whole crew will report to the Commander in Chief of the front."

With a leisurely movement he turned the creaking telephone crank, got his connection, and said a few words in a low voice before hanging up the receiver, after which he addressed the officer on duty.

"Have as many carts as possible ready immediately, please, Comrade. Mobilize workers from the munitions plant for the unloading. Supervise the execution of the order, and report to me."

The two men withdrew to another room. The officer started cranking up the telephone and speaking into it in muffled tones: "Transport department. . . . I want Comrade Ivanov. Not there? Killed? Call someone else. Headquarters of the front calling." Ivan Ilyich sat down to fill up the blank. The situation was obvious. To report for duty to the Commander meant being sent straight to the trenches. Ivan Ilyich had grown soft on the steamer, but now, as the squeaking pen dug into the paper, he felt the familiar upheaval of will he had so often experienced in the last few years, when all that was peaceful and warm and homelike, all that kept watch over his life and his comfort, had to be regretfully pushed into the background, and another Ivan Ilyich—primitive, harsh, resolute—had to take over.

But five o'clock was still a long way away. Telegin handed in the blank and went out of the room into the corridor. Sapozhkov got up hastily from a wooden bench.

"Are you free? Come on, let's find a place to talk!"

He glanced mockingly at the dazed Telegin. Sapozhkov was the same as ever—restless, tense, always seeming to know something which nobody else knew—but his looks had changed greatly. His once rosy face seemed to have shrunk, and he was like a well-preserved old man. Telegin explained that he must hurry back to the landing stage to get the crew together and unload some crates. . . .

"A pity! Never mind, I'll go with you to the landing stage. I've been holding my tongue for three months, Ivan, and I got into such a state that I almost began writing 'Memoirs of an Ex-Intellectual' in hospital. . . . I don't drink any more, brother, I've forgotten how. . . ."

He was obviously profoundly affected by the meeting with Ivan Ilyich. They went out into the street, and the wind propelled them all the way down to the ever-darkening Volga, over which long crests of foam were racing.

"Where's the regiment, Sergei Sergeyevich? How did you get separated from it?"

"There's practically nothing left of our regiment. There's no such regiment in the 11th Army any more."

Telegin gazed at him in horrified silence. Sheltering his eyes from the dust with his hand, Sapozhkov said:

"The end came at the Besspokoini farmstead. Didn't you hear of the tragic fate of the 11th Army? Commander in Chief Sorokin made a thorough hash of things. Shooting would be too good for him, the son-of-a-bitch! He kept from the army the order of the Military Council of the Tsaritsyn front to break through and join up with the 10th Army. Only Shelest's division obeyed the order and marched on Tsaritsyn, and that only because Sorokin declared Shelest an outlaw and tried to have him shot. Just think! We were cut off from Mineralniye Vodi; we were cut off from Stavropol, where the Taman Army was in dire straits. Sorokin ran away from Tikhoretskaya, leaving his ammunition carts behind in his panic. Shkuro's cavalry was bearing down on us from the right, Wrangel's from the left. We had to retreat eastward, through the waterless steppe. All that remained of my regiment was a single company. We slept on the march—anything to shake off the enemy—we marched through gullies . . . no food, no water, only the icy wind and that accursed steppe! There were actually cases when men on horseback were frozen to death and buried in the sand bolt upright, as in a Scythian barrow. . . . We got to Besspokoini—not a soul, not so much as a hen, the Cossacks had taken the very dogs. The huts were all unlocked, the doors wide open. . . . But the lads found some milk and started drinking it for all they were worth. Understand? Next minute they were rolling about the floor, and it was too late to do anything. Only about thirty of us were left alive. . . . And at daybreak, of course, we were surrounded by machine guns and finished off. . . ."

Ivan Ilyich began unconsciously walking faster and faster as he listened, till at last he stumbled.

"And how is it *you* escaped?"

"God knows! I had luck. I was wounded at the very start . . . in the arm . . . a nerve or something was affected, and I lost consciousness. . . . I've changed my mind about a lot of things since then. . . . While I lay there on my back some of the men must have bandaged my arm and lifted me on a rick and

covered me with straw. . . . At such a time they thought of me! I tell you—we don't know our people, and we never have known them. Ivan Bunin* says they are wild beasts, and Merezhkovsky** calls them sacrilegious brutes, the vandals of the future. Remember our talk in the train? I was drunk, but I have forgotten nothing. Where did we go wrong—was it in failing to realize that, just as a visible target is necessary for the adjusting of fire, profound experience of life is required for the adjustment of our philosophy and logic? Immanuel Kant*** is one thing—revolution is quite another!"

"And what happened next, Sergei Sergeyevich?"

"What happened next? I crawled out of the straw in the night. They were bawling songs in the hut, which meant that the victors were already drunk. I stumbled over a mutilated corpse, and then another—and I could see it all. I caught a horse, rode into the steppe, and wandered about there for several ghastly days. . . . I was picked up by a detachment of Budyonny's cavalry—there's a cavalryman in the Salsk steppe of that name—and they took me to the station of Kuberle, and from there I was sent to this place. And here I am, hanging about the hospital. . . . My service record, all my papers, stayed there in the straw, in the pocket of my coat. Remember that fur coat of mine? I shall never get another like it. . . ."

"And was Gimza killed, too?"

"We lost Gimza a long time ago, when we lost the transport carts. He had a terrific attack of spotted typhus. . . ."

"I'm sorry about Gimza."

"I'm sorry about them all, Ivan. . . . But no, it isn't that, exactly. . . . It's simply I was fond of the regiment, and somehow it seems awkward to be the only one alive. . . . I don't know what to do with myself, Ivan! I went to headquarters to ask for a company . . . anything. . . . But of course I quite understand them, they know nothing about me and all I have

* *I. A. Bunin* (1870-1953)—Russian poet and fiction writer; the author of a series of short novels, depicting the cheerless life of the prerevolutionary countryside, idealising the past and the rapidly-disintegrating conditions of life in the estates of the landed gentry. Emigrated to France when the October Revolution broke out.

** *D. M. Merezhkovsky* (1865-1941)—Russian prose writer and poet; symbolist, mystic, hostile to the Revolution, an emigré.

*** *Immanuel Kant* (1724-1804)—the father of the German idealism of the second half of the XVIII and early XIX centuries.

to show is my soldier's ticket. . . . Could you speak for me at headquarters?"

"Of course I will, Sergei Sergeyevich!"

"The best thing would be for you to take me into your detachment. It would, upon my word! I could be your second-in-command, your signalman, anything. Look how fate plays with us! Remember how we used to write verse in your flat, how we scared the bourgeoisie? Nothing is in vain, everything has its consequences. You fool about, and forget, and suddenly you find yourself face to face with a spectacle so overwhelming that it makes your hair stand on end. Oh, and do you remember how I found you in that shed where the Germans had locked you up? That was a raid, oh, what a massacre! I actually broke the blade of my sword. . . . It's grand to be together again. You seem to radiate health, Ivan. . . . I must have got fond of you, or something. . . . By the way, where's your wife?"

But they were now overtaken by horse-drawn lorries, descending in a thunderous trot to the landing stage, and further conversation became impossible.

The slowly moving clouds were tinged with the crimson of the vast, sombre sunset glow, barely visible through the cloud of dust over the town. Snowflakes began to rotate over the river in a tenuous maze. Carts loaded with munitions had long ago left the landing stage with an escort of armed workers. The dockside was deserted. The ship, showing no lights, had left the landing stage, to moor somewhere downstream.

The sailors, their reefer-jackets tightly belted, weighed down with hand grenades, kitbags, and rifles, were sitting about the landing stage, in the lee of the office. There was no smoking or talking. The workers had told them what was going on in this deserted town, only lighted by the sinister glare of the sunset. Things looked bad.

Ivan Ilyich, looking nervously at his watch, and going continually to the telephone to call up headquarters, waited for horses to take away the guns. It appeared that the teams had already been dispatched, and the detachment was to escort the guns straight to the railway station. Opening the door of the office in the teeth of the wind, he went on to the landing stage, and almost ran into Anisya Nazarova.

"What are you doing here?"

She compressed her lips, without saying a word; but her head drooped beneath his glance. A worn, patched shawl, crossed over her chest and tied at the back, seemed to be her only protection against the cold, and a canvas bag was slung over her shoulders.

"No, no!" said Ivan Ilyich. "Back to the steamer with you, Anisya, I don't need you in the detachment."

While the guns were being rolled down the planks on to the sand, and the teams harnessed, the clouds faded away, and it became hard to distinguish the river from the darkling banks. Just as the detachment was starting towards the town, urging on the small, sturdy horses harnessed to the guns, Sharigin came up to Ivan Ilyich and said to him in low tones:

"What are we to do with Anisya? The fellows want her to stay with the detachment."

Latugin, letting go of the wheel of a gun, approached Ivan Ilyich from the other side.

"Comrade Commander, she's a sort of mother to us. You know what the front is! She could fetch things, wash a shirt now and then. She's a real fighter, you know, although she looks so quiet. She follows us about like a dog, what's to be done?"

And behind Ivan Ilyich was Anisya herself, marching with the detachment, her head still drooping.

"We'll call her an untrained nurse. . . ."

Ivan Ilyich nodded: "Good idea! I meant to let her stay, anyhow." Latugin ran back to the gun carriage and clutched at one of its wheels, shouting "Gee up with you!" at the horses, who were straining at their load up the slope. The sand loosened in the process started up in billowing clouds, enveloping the men, and at last the wheels began rolling over the street. In the small, dimly seen houses, not a window was lit up; telegraph wires moaned agonizingly, shop signs clattered. Ivan Ilyich trudged along, smiling: "You've been given a lesson!" he told himself. "A rap over the knuckles. Hi, commander, you're not considerate of people's feelings! It's true, too. Lay on your back all the way from Nizhni to Tsaritsyn, doing nothing, and never discovered what these chaps are really like. . . . All you see is their rolling gait and the fluttering ribbons on their caps. How was it that they had spontaneously and without any previous discussion identified themselves

with Anisya's grief, her piteous fate—and at the very moment when they were forced to abandon the easy life on board, and march God knows where in the pitch dark, through icy sandstorms, to fight and to die? Are they, then, such heroes? But no, they seem to be the most ordinary people. . . . You're not much of a commander, Ivan Ilyich. . . . Just a commonplace individual. . . . The good commander bears in mind, however desperate the situation, the complex soul of each of the men in his charge. . . ."

His recent conversation with Sergei Sergeyevich, and the incident with Anisya, insignificant as it might appear, had stirred Ivan Ilyich deeply. His first impulse was one of self-castigation: he reproached himself with egoism, indifference, obtuseness and dullness. . . . In such times he had managed to get fat—even Sergei Sergeyevich remarked it. . . . In the midst of this bitter meditation, Ivan Ilyich caught himself thinking of something quite different, and he felt suddenly warm, as if his heart had been steeped in a moment's bliss—behind all this self-probing was there not the secret hope of winning back Dasha's love? He snorted as an eddy of dust met him round a corner, and tried to drive away all such inappropriate thoughts.

At the railway station Ivan Ilyich received the order to entrain the guns immediately and take up an artillery position in the neighbourhood of the station of Voroponovo. The order was handed to him by the commandant—a tall fellow with saturnine eyes, black as a March night, and a luxurious growth of whisker on his cheeks. Somewhat taken aback, Ivan Ilyich began to explain that he was not an artilleryman, but an infantry commander, and could not undertake the responsibility of commanding a battery. The commandant said in low and menacing tones:

"Is the order clear to you, Comrade?"

"Quite clear. But I want to explain to you, Comrade. . . ."

"At the present moment the command does not require your explanations. Do you intend to fulfil the order?"

"So that's the way they talk here!" thought Telegin, and with an involuntary salute, and a "Very good, Comrade!" he turned on his heel and made for the station.

Things were done in unprecedented ways, here. At the stations in other towns, for instance, to get anywhere you had to stride across prostrate crowds of disguised bourgeois, deserters, peasants (men and women), lying about on sacks

from which protruded the tail of a cock, or in which squealed a piglet. But here there was nobody in sight, and the floors were actually swept, though the dust blown through the broken windows lay in a thick film on the walls and on the long-abandoned counter of the refreshment room. Here people even spoke in a special manner—briefly, and a thought menacingly, as if they had a finger on the trigger all the time.

Ivan Ilyich obtained an engine and a freighting order with no unnecessary running up and down, and no shouting. He rang up headquarters about Sapozhkov and received the reply: "All right, take him at your own risk." The crew had already loaded the guns on two trucks beneath the light of swaying lanterns. Ivan Ilyich stood looking into the faces of the sailors. There was Gagin, a Novgorod man, his harsh face deeply lined, his black hair falling over his forehead to his eyebrows, beneath the cap with the word "Besposhchadny" in gilt letters on the band. And there was Baikov, a wag and a heavy drinker who hailed from the northern seacoast, with a flowing, dusty beard that seemed to be glued to his small face, and a round, tough-looking cranium. Nine of the men held on to the wheels of the gun carriage, rolling it up the steeply-tilted boards, but Baikov was here, there and everywhere: "It's coming, Comrades, just another shove. . . ." One of them lunged at him with his knee: "Why don't you lend a hand, yourself, you funny dog?"

And here was Latugin, the Nizhni Novgorod man from the Kerzhenets forests, with a broad, saucy face, an aquiline nose which must have been broken in some fight, not very tall, but a giant for strength, clear-headed, dangerous to quarrel with, and a devil with women. And here was Zaduviter. . . .

"Ivan Ilyich," it was Sharigin speaking. "Have you any idea where this Voroponovo is?"

"I know nothing about these parts."

"Why, it's quite near, beyond Tsaritsyn—the front's here, too. . . . They say the Whites are pushing right on. . . . Any amount of artillery, and tanks and airplanes . . . and a hundred thousand Cossack marauders following the troops on carts."

Sharigin spoke in low, agitated tones, his blue eyes shone, his sensitive lips trembled in a nervous smile. Ivan Ilyich frowned.

"Well, haven't you ever been in a real battle, Sharigin?"

Sharigin flushed violently, even his small nose reddened.

"I advise you to pay less attention to all sorts of talk. . . . It's nothing but panic. . . . Have you seen to supplies for the detachment?"

"Yes!"

Sharigin's hand flew up to his cap, a thing that seldom happened with him. His face cleared. "A good lad," thought Telegin. "Too impressionable, but he'll get over that." Ivan Ilyich went up to the freight van, which was coupled behind the trucks carrying the guns. Sapozhkov came running excitedly up the platform, his kitbag and sword under his arm. . . .

"Ivan, have you spoken about me?"

"It's all settled, Sergei Sergeevich. Get in!"

Sapozhkov climbed into the freight van. Anisya was already seated in a corner of it, on a heap of seamen's belongings.

Not far from Voroponovo, a station on the Western railway line, the guns were unloaded before daybreak and placed at the disposal of one of the artillery battalions posted there. Here Telegin and his detachment learned that things were grave at the front. Fortifications were being made just below Voroponovo, forming a horseshoe some eight miles from Tsaritsyn, beginning at the north, at the station of Gumrak, and ending at Sarepta, south of Tsaritsyn. This fortified belt was the last line of defence. Behind it stretched a low range of foothills, and beyond these the plain sloped right up to the edge of the town. The only retreat lay along the Volga, in the icy waves.

Yesterday's wind had dispersed the clouds, piling them up in impenetrable gloom over the horizon. The rising sun gave no heat. The flat brown plain was seething with human beings, engaged in digging, driving in stakes, fixing barbed-wire entanglements, and piling up sandbags. Freight trains kept coming from Tsaritsyn, people got out of them, headed for the steppe and disappeared beneath the earth's surface. Others clambered out of freshly-dug pits and staggered wearily towards the station. It was as if everybody in the town capable of holding a spade had been sent here, willy-nilly, to work.

One of these work parties, fifteen or so men and women of the most varied aspect, was approaching Telegin's battery, led by a shrunk old man—a military engineer.

"Citizens!" he cried in a hoarse voice, the ends of his grey moustache protruding from a tightly wound camel-hair muffler. "Your task is a simple one. I need a fourteen-inch parapet. You must dig the earth from there, and throw it on the top, till it reaches the mark on this stake. . . . Stand a foot apart from one another and all get to work!"

He clapped his small hands reassuringly, purple with cold as they were, and clambered briskly out of the dugout into which he had jumped. The others followed him with glances full of indignation. One of the women shook her head and shouted after him:

"For shame, Grigori Grigorevich, for shame!"

The rest stood where they were, holding their spades as if they were the instruments of the proletarian dictatorship. One of them—a thick-lipped youth with a prominent Adam's apple, who seemed delighted to find himself in the front line, made as if to dig, but the rest all began hissing at him:

"For shame, Petya, stop it this minute. . . ."

And they all started talking at once, addressing an individual with a nervous, sallow countenance, who had till this moment stood swaying slightly with closed eyes. His overcoat, showing that he was an official of the department of People's Education, seemed to flaunt the piece of string which did duty as his belt.

"Why don't you speak, Stepan Alexeyevich? We elected you. . . . We count on you. . . ."

He raised his eyelids with a martyred look, and a muscle in one of his cheeks began to twitch.

"I will speak, gentlemen, but I will not speak to Grigori Grigorevich. Grigori Grigorevich is lost to us."

Just then a clod flew from the top of the unfinished parapet, and the muzzle of a horse, its teeth working at the bit, appeared above it, the broad-shouldered, red-cheeked, bearded rider, in his Kuban shako, leaning down from the saddle. Narrowing his eyes, he asked mockingly:

"How about it, citizens—can't you decide whether to work or not?"

Then the nervous Stepan Alexeyevich, he whose coat was belted with string, moved forward a step, and raising his face towards the horseman answered him with persuasive gentleness, like a teacher addressing children in school:

"As far as I understand, Comrade, you are the senior in command here. . . ." "H'm!" said the horseman and nodded assent gaily, his gloved hand patting his horse, as it stood cautiously on the edge of the dugout. "On behalf of our group, Comrade, forcibly mobilized tonight on the strength of some lists of which nobody knows anything, I express an energetic protest. . . ."

"H'm!" said the bearded horseman, but this time there was menace in the syllable.

"Yes, we protest," said Stepan Alexeyevich in a high-pitched voice. "You are compelling people unfitted for physical labour to dig trenches for you. . . . This is reviving the era of tyranny! You have resorted to violence."

The muscles in both cheeks were now twitching, and he closed his eyes as if he thought he had said too much, his uplifted sallow face swaying from side to side. . . . The horseman narrowed his eyes at him, his wide nostrils trembled, his lips formed a stern line, like a gash across his face. Alighting from his horse, he jumped into the dugout and said, shaking out the folds of his cavalry breeches with a single blow:

"Quite right! If you won't defend Tsaritsyn voluntarily, we shall compel you to do it. Why does that anger you? Come on now, give me a spade somebody!"

Without looking at any of them he extended his great hand in its brown glove, and the stout, round-faced woman who had been the first to protest, hastily handed him her spade, fixing her astonished glance on him the while.

"Why should we quarrel?" continued the horseman. "It's a pure misunderstanding." He thrust the spade into the ground, lifted a clod of earth and threw it overhead with a powerful gesture, on to the parapet. "We are fighting, and you are aiding us, we have a common foe. . . . The Cossacks will show quarter to nobody-me, they'll flay alive, and all of you they will flog wholesale, while some will be hacked by their swords. . . ."

He threw up a few more spadefuls and glanced rapidly at the onlookers. He fairly emanated health and strength.

"Come on, now!" He patted the shoulders of the youth with the prominent Adam's apple, and of a pleasant, dull-looking lad, with straw-coloured eyelashes. "Come on, now-shall we show them how to work?"

Smiling sheepishly, the boys began to dig and throw up the earth. A few others, shrugging their shoulders, also began to take up their spades. The round-faced lady said: "Very well—I will, too!" and stumbled over her spade. The bearded commander immediately went to her assistance—he must have given her a good squeeze, for she flushed and brightened up. Stepan Alexeyevich saw himself threatened by conspicuous isolation.

"Well, well. . . ." he said, in his shrill voice. "But Comrades—the revolution—and violence! The first duty of a revolution is to put down all forms of violence."

"The revolution," said the bearded commander in resonant tones, "employs violence against the enemies of the toilers, and itself came into existence through this violence. . . . Is that clear?"

"Excuse me—but that's unethical. . . ."

"The proletariat is only committing violence towards you in order to free the whole world from violence. . . ."

"Excuse me. . . ."

"No," said the commander firmly. "I shall not excuse you. You are beginning to fool about, and that's sabotage. Take up your spade. . . ."

"And so, Comrades, I may rely on the parapet being ready by eleven o'clock. Good-bye to you."

The sailors, who had been listening a little way off to this conversation, were doubled up with laughter. When the Artillery Commander of the 10th Army left, they went up to help the intellectuals, so that their enthusiasm should not cool.

* IV *

Pyotr Nikolayevich Melshin's regiment was retreating with the whole division along the left bank of the Don, beating off day and night the advance units of the second column of the well-equipped Don Army, which was formed on the lines of a standing army. Melshin's men were worn out by fighting and night marches, without regular meals, sleep or rest. Krasnov's Cossacks were familiar with every gully, every depression in the steppe, and drove the enemy to those places where it was most convenient to attack them. Their infantry units were up at dawn, drawing the enemy's fire, while the cavalry squadrons made their way by gullies and ravines to

the flanks, falling furiously upon them with frantic whistles and howls.

"The great thing, Comrades, is to keep our heads," Melshin told his men. "Our strength is in solidarity. We are not to be frightened off by fleabites. We know what we are fighting for—death has no terrors for us. But the Cossack, though valiant, is greedy—it's loot he's out for, *he* doesn't want to lose his life, and above all, he cherishes his horse."

Ivan Gora's company made up the rear guard, covering supply-transport carts, every one of which contained wounded. They could not be abandoned, and there was nowhere to leave them: all survivors of battles on whom the Red star was found were stripped to the skin and hacked to pieces, both by cavalry and infantry. Their grim work accomplished, the Cossacks, wiping their blades on their horses' manes, would ride away, casting backward glances at the horribly mutilated corpses.

Never before on the Don had there been such furious hatred as that which raged in the rich villages of Veshenskaya, Kurmoyarskaya, Esaulovskaya, Potemkinskaya, Nizhne-Chirskaya, Ust-Medvedinskaya. Agitators arrived in these places from Novocherkassk, and Krasnov himself visited some villages. The "Circle of the Saviours of the Don" was summoned by church bell, and the agitators, taking off their caps and bowing low, as of old, appealed to the Cossacks to sharpen their swords and put their feet into the stirrups. "Your hour has struck, rise, free land of the Don! . . . We will come down like a thundercloud on Tsaritsyn, destroy the accursed nest of Communists, cleanse the Don of the Red plague. . . . They don't want the Don to live a prosperous, happy life! They want to carry off our herds and flocks, to give our lands to muzhiks from Tula and Orel, to drag our wives into their beds, to send you, Cossacks, the salt of the Don earth, to work in the mines for the rest of your lives. . . . Do not allow the temple of the Lord to be polluted, defend the altar of our native land! Do not grudge your lives. . . . And the ataman of the great Don army will give Tsaritsyn over to you for three days and three nights."

Company Commander Ivan Gora, tall, round-shouldered, his face dark from lack of sleep, got used to the sight of

Cossack horsemen looming on the horizon; versed in their ways, he never allowed the men to take cover needlessly, but simply told them to march on, looking neither right nor left. The supply columns, so close one to the other that their axles almost touched, headed the ranks of gaunt and tattered men, who forged ahead with heavy, swaying gait, staring fixedly at the ground beneath their feet. Last of all went Ivan Gora, staggering as if drunk. Only six months before he had been a powerful man, but the wound in the head he had received from the blow of an axe in a shed, while collecting grain supplies under the Surplus Appropriation System, had told on him, as had the concussion he had suffered in the battle of Likhaya. He trudged on, sometimes quite lively, sometimes almost comatose; a pleasing memory would float past his dimming eyes—people sitting on logs in the summer twilight, a bat circling over their heads. . . . A pillow in a print case, flung down on dock leaves, and on it the laughing face of Agrippina. . . . He tried to drive away these dreams, halting, settling the strap on his shoulder, forcing his heavy eyelids open so as to take in the sight of the trudging men, the wounded bobbing up and down in the carts. The flat scorched steppe swimming and swaying, brown, colourless, melancholy, seemed to have entered his very being—for as far as you could see, there was not a tree, not so much as a telegraph post. Stumbling, he shook his head. . . . Oh, to steal up to a cart, put his hand on its rim, and just have a minute's nap, on the move!

Again! The tiny figures of horsemen on the edge of the steppe, shots, bullets whistling innocently. . . .

"Wake up, Comrades! Attention! Don't go to sleep there in the carts!"

His wife Agrippina, wounded in the arm, was making the journey in a cart. And Dasha and Kuzma Kuzmich walked behind the cart.

Long-drawn cries rent the darkness. The carts halted. Dasha immediately leaned against the rim of the cart, putting her head down on her arms. Through her sleep she heard Ivan Gora approach and talk in low tones to Agrippina, who was sitting in that very cart. . . .

"If only I could smoke—I can hardly stand. . . ."

"Why have we stopped?"

"For a rest—till five."

"Who told you?"

"A messenger came."

"Put your head on my lap, Ivan—have a nap."

"A nap! As if *he'd* let you! Our fellows are dropping with exhaustion. Why aren't you asleep, Agrippina? Does your arm hurt?"

"Yes."

The cart creaked faintly as he drew Agrippina towards him. He sighed profoundly, like a weary horse.

"The messenger said: 'You should see the enemy hosts, crossing the Don at Kalach and Nizhne-Chirskaya! And after them come priests with banners, and carts with barrels of vodka. The Cossacks rush to the attack drunk, they're like regular butchers!...'"

"Have a bit of bread, Ivan."

He began slowly munching. Swallowing the bread with an effort, he said thickly:

"We've come to the Don. There should be a ferryboat not far from here, the Cossacks must have pushed it over to the other side; I suppose that's why we've stopped."

The cart tilted back into position—Ivan Gora fell back and stumped away. A stillness fell upon men and horses alike. Dasha breathed into her sleeve. She would have given anything for such a moment of restrained affection with a beloved man. Oh, envious, jealous heart! You should have thought of this before! What more had she wanted? She had had her beloved, her dear one at her side, and she had let him go... and lost him for ever... She might call him, cry: "Ivan Ilyich!", "Vanya!", "Vanyusha!" but he would not come...

Dasha was awakened by Kuzma Kuzmich. She was lying huddled up beneath a cart. Shots could be heard. The dawn was staining the sky a pale green. It was so cold that Dasha, her teeth chattering, blew on her finger tips.

"Darya Dmitrevna, pick up your bag, quick, come on, there are wounded..."

The shots which were coming from below, from the bank of the river, sounded hollow in the early morning stillness. Dasha struggled to her feet, quite numb from her brief sleep on the cold earth. Kuzma Kuzmich straightened out her nurse's armlet, and ran ahead, returning to say:

"Quicker, sweetheart, look alive! Our people are here, not far off... Can't you hear somebody moaning? You can't?"

He ran forward again, then stopped, craning his neck and looking round. Dasha took no notice of his fussiness, but she couldn't help hating him for being such a coward. . . .

"Do bend down, sweetheart, can't you hear the bullets whistling?"

It was all pure imagination—there were no moans from wounded men, and no bullets were whistling. The glow in the sky took on warmer tints. Ahead was a white film, as if the river had overflowed its banks. It was the thick autumn mist, hanging low over the river and over the bare branches of the willows on its banks. Ivan Gora stood out of it as if he were up to his waist in milk. Further on was a soldier in a high cap, and another and yet another, all visible from the waist up. They were looking at the right bank of the Don—the high bank, to which the mist did not reach. There, behind the dark undergrowth, innumerable columns of smoke were rising in the still air.

Kuzma Kuzmich saw them, too.

"Look, Darya Dmitrevna!" he gabbled excitedly. "They've come to loot in the wake of the army! Look at the carts! There are thousands of them! It's just like the nomad tribes of old! Look! Unharnessed horses, carts. . . . See those bearded chaps, with knives stuck in their boot tops, lying around the fires? Do look, Darya Dmitrevna, such a sight is only to be seen once in a lifetime!"

Dasha saw neither carts, nor horses, nor Cossacks lying around the fires. . . . And yet her flesh crept. . . . Ivan Gora turned, motioning to them with his hand to squat down into the mist. Kuzma Kuzmich, as if looking up from the pages of some absorbing tale, murmured:

"Our intellectuals ought to see that! Eh? It's like a dream! They wanted a constitution . . . they wanted to rule the Russian people. . . . Eh-h-h-h-h. . . . the stories they invented about the Russian people . . . so patient, so lazy, so pious. . . . Eh-h-h-h-h. . . . And just look at them! Waist-deep in mist, wise, menacing, thoroughly aware of their destiny, their gaze fixed on the enemy hosts. . . . A new giant is girding up his loins, and drawing on his gauntlets—a force as yet unknown to history. . . ."

The distant sound of rifle and machine-gun fire suddenly ceased. Kuzma Kuzmich broke off in the middle of a sentence. Ivan Gora, standing ahead of them, turned his head.

Further along the river two hollow explosions resounded over the water and the mist was immediately tinged with a murky crimson glow. Distant cries could be heard, and the shots rang out again, at shorter intervals.

"Our fellows have burned the ferryboat on the other side, I do declare!" exclaimed Kuzma Kuzmich, poking his head out of the mist. "Oh-h-h! the massacre over there, the massacre. . . ."

Ivan Gora, with a line of soldiers, ran up to the riverbank, bending low as they ran, and hid in the undergrowth. Now the sunrise had spread over the whole horizon. The mist, thinning, shifted, floating in tatters among the bare branches of the willows. From the shelter of the bank, veiled by the mist, came such terrible shrieks that Dasha pressed her clenched hands against her ears, and Kuzma Kuzmich flung himself full length on the ground.

The sound of blows, arms clanging, shots, howls, water splashing, hand grenades exploding. . . .

Ivan Gora reappeared from out of the bushes. He was gulping down draughts of air as he walked, and breathing out again heavily. He had no cap on his head, but was holding two Cossack peaked caps with red bands. Coming up to Dasha, he said:

"I'll send stretchers, and you go as quick as you can to the river—there are two comrades there who need bandaging. . . ."

Glancing at the caps in his hand, he flung one away, and pulled the other jerkily down over his forehead.

"They thought they'd outflank us on boats, the swine. . . . Go on, don't be afraid, it's all over there. . . ."

* V *

The banks of the Don between the villages of Nizhne-Chirskaya and Kalach resounded with the noise of the cavalry and infantry regiments of the great Don Army, as it crossed the river by three pontoon bridges, by ferries, and in boats. The cavalry squadrons, in new uniforms, their round caps perched on the sides of their heads, the forelocks, famous in song, pulled in the traditional manner over their foreheads, crossed in battle formation. Pennants fluttered from lances, water splashed up between the planks of the bridges beneath

the hoofs of the young horses, who cocked their eyes timidly at the grey Don.

Long boats floated across the river, filled with infantry—beardless youths, who gaped at the melee of Cossacks, horses, and carts. Jumping out of the boats into the water they clambered up the steep bank, lined up, stood the butts of their rifles against their feet, and tore off their caps. Deacons with streaming locks bellowed ferociously, clattering their censers, while priests, looking like golden bells in their flowery vestments, blessed the troops.

General Mamontov, commander of the White troops, watched the crossing from his horse's back on the top of a high funeral barrow. Behind him were drawn up some of his senior officers, his standard-bearer, and escort. He was visible to all, in his black Cossack cloak, seated like a statue on the pearl-grey horse, impatiently pawing the ground with its hoof. The troops passed by singing to the accompaniment of the rolling drums, the horse-hair tassels on the wands of the band leaders rising and falling in the air. Heavy guns boomed from the east over the brown steppe, quite hidden from sight in the dust raised by the oncoming troops.

The Commander, shielding his eyes from the rays of the sun, a whip dangling from his wrist, watched the slant-winged airplanes gliding overhead. He counted them, following their flight as they swooped down and disappeared beneath the horizon.

Ponderous howitzers, their shields and barrels roughly dazzle-painted, were dragged past the barrow at a heavy gallop by small, unmatched rough-coated horses with shaggy fetlocks, the bearded drivers urging them forward with their whips to make them show their mettle. Before the dust raised by these had settled, there followed huge tanks made of riveted iron plate, their front sprockets rearing upward. Mamontov counted them—ten steel monsters for crushing the Red swine to death in the streets of Tsaritsyn. He trotted his horse down the side of the barrow, and galloped along the bank of the river, the inky-blue pennon streaming over his head, as the standard-bearer followed him, half a length behind.

Fresh troops came up and got into the boats, hay and supplies of all sorts of other necessities were ferried across. Carts, light carriages, great hay wagons, such as are used on farms for removing the sheaves from the fields, were drawn

up beside the ferry. Dignified figures stood among the carts, waiting for the ferry. Some were sauntering up and down, others sitting and eating beside campfires. These were the Cossack traders sent from the villages to look after the affairs of their own people in the army. They missed nothing—received loot, whether money, cattle, grain, fodder, or other necessities of life, such as clothing, blankets, mattresses, feather beds, mirrors and rifles; from all these they supplied their units with fodder and provisions, and, when necessary, with clothing and arms. They made lists of everything left over, loaded it on carts, and sent it back to the villages under the guard of women and boys.

Mamontov passed through the hamlet of Richkov, where half the farms were burned down, and the barns were charred and blackened, and turned off to follow the railway track, till an armoured train should come up from the right.

The Don Army, consisting of twelve cavalry and eight infantry divisions, advanced in five columns.

All five columns were moving swiftly towards the last line of Tsaritsyn's defences. The 10th Red Army, which had lost touch with the northern and southern units, was retreating, closing in on an ever narrowing front. Its five divisions, now greatly reduced, were using up their last ammunition and their last forces.

The Supreme Military Council of the Republic, which should have given decisive aid to the 10th Army during these days, was in the grip of secret, ably-masked sabotage, expressing itself in the excessive slowing down of all movements, and in the insistence that the struggle for Tsaritsyn was a matter of secondary importance, and that the attitude of the Tsaritsyn Military Council was due to panic.

And so Tsaritsyn had to beat off the Whites with its own forces.

In those days two orders were issued by the Military Council of the 10th Army: the first, to dispatch all steamers, barges, boats and ferries from Tsaritsyn northwards, so that there could be no possibility for troops to retreat along the left bank of the Volga; the second, addressed to the army: not to retreat from positions occupied without further instructions—anyone infringing this order to be shot.

The early part of the day passed peacefully in Telegin's battery. There was the thundering of guns somewhere on the horizon, but the plain was deserted. The sailors were building a dugout. Anisya went to the station without asking for permission, returning three hours later, staggering under the burden of two sacks—one containing loaves, the other, water-melons. Emptying the sacks, she spread them between the guns, and sliced the bread, cutting each melon into four: "Eat!" she said, and stood aside, modest, satisfied, watching the famished sailors devour the melons. They ate without wiping their cheeks, with approving cries of:

"Anisya, Anisya!"

"Three cheers for Anisya!"

"There's no one like her!"

The dignified Sharigin, who always had to put his word in, said:

"She has initiative—that's the great thing."

The sailors, looking up from the hunks of melon, gave a universal shout of laughter. Frowning, Sharigin rose, and picked up his spade. "I propose, Comrades, that we make Anisya a dugout to herself. Such comrades must be cherished...."

The sailors had their laugh out, and set to work digging a little trench in the gully at the back of the battery, for Anisya to take cover in should there be firing. After that there was nothing left for them to do. The piles of shells unloaded from the steamer were set out in rows on either side of the guns. Rifles had been cleaned, and Sapozhkov established communications with the battalion command post. The sailors lay about the hollows, basking in the sun. We're ready to receive you now, General Mamontov!

Ivan Ilyich sat on a gun carriage, twirling a dry stalk in his hands, and every now and then snapping off a bit. He did not go in for high-flown arguments—this little world of people round him, gathered together from all over the country, all so unlike, yet all linking up their fates so readily, was very dear to him. Sergei Sergeyevich Sapozhkov, for instance, always bristling with fantastic ideas—one would have thought there was no adhesive strong enough to bind him to his fellow men, but suddenly everyone seemed to need him, and he seemed to be at home among them, as he lay breathing quietly beside the wheel. Sharigin, ambitious, but no great

shakes intellectually, a transparent nature lacking in subtlety, but a determined fellow—there he lay on his side, asleep with his cheek on his fist. Zaduiviter, stretched so luxuriously on the sand, turning his handsome, but primitively modelled countenance towards the sun; wily, bold, calculating, he would go back to his farm if he survived. Latugin, another giant, from the forests of Kerzhenets, was snoring powerfully, his cap over his face. He was a great deal more subtle, but without guile—he had no need of any—he was completely unaware of the heights he was storming with his revolver and hand grenade. . . .

Twelve persons had entrusted their lives to Ivan Ilyich. The Military Council had handed the battery over to him at a most critical moment. . . . True, he had a certain knowledge of mathematics, but still he ought to have declared firmly that it was not for him to command a battery. . . .

"Gagin, is there anyone here who knows how to calculate sight angles? We have no range finder, you know."

Gagin, who was standing on a ledge in the wall of the dugout, looking across the parapet towards the steppe, turned.

"Range finders!" he echoed moodily, fixing a black gaze on Telegin. "What d'you want a range finder for? They'll give us the angle over the telephone at the command post!"

"Oh—all right!"

"Angles, firing data, time fuses, we know all about them. That's not the point, Comrade Telegin. . . . The battle will be fierce—it won't be a matter of range finders, but of fury. . . . Shoot till the last shell has been fired, even if you have to wind your guts round your fingers—that's what you should be thinking about. . . . Come up here, I'll show you!"

Telegin climbed up beside him on the ledge. The artillery cannonade sounded louder, as if it were approaching nearer, and to the south and west the horizon was veiled in clouds of smoke. Following the direction indicated by Gagin's finger, he made out a group of men and a file of carts crawling from northwards over the plain.

"Our men on the run," said Gagin, nodding towards a vast mushroom-shaped pillar of smoke in the south, in the direction of Sarepta. "I've been watching them a long time—thousands have run over that terrain, thousands. . . . See the explosions? There weren't any before. They're firing their

heavy guns. You can expect the General here by the morning."

Ivan Ilyich once more inspected the equipment of his battery. He counted the shells and cartridges all over again—there were only two clips to each rifle. He was particularly worried at the exposed position of the battery. Freshly dug trenches were visible a few hundred feet away, but no movement could be seen in them—the units of the Red troops lay a great deal farther. He squatted down beside Sapozhkov—Sergei Sergeyevich's face was all puckered up, as if even sleep was no easy task for him.

"Sorry, Sergei Sergeyevich, but I want you to connect me with the Battalion Commander."

Sapozhkov opened dim eyes.

"What for? The order has been given not to fire. They'll tell us when the time comes. . . . What are you worrying about?" He moved closer to the wheel and yawned, but this was obviously mere affectation. "Why don't you lie down and go to sleep? There's nothing like it!"

Ivan Ilyich went back to the ledge and stood motionless there for a long time, his hand on the parapet. The huge, dark orange sun was sinking into the haze rising from the hoofs of innumerable Cossack horses from somewhere beyond the horizon. The shades of night were advancing over the plain and it was no longer possible to distinguish the movements of troops. Below the clear evening star a fantastic land on the shores of a green ocean stood out against the sunset sky—Chinese pagodas appeared, one of them breaking away and turning first into a horse with two heads, and then into a woman wringing her hands. . . .

It seemed as if one only had to clamber out of the dugout, lift up one's legs and fly as in a dream to this exquisite land. Surely its appearance meant something—something for oneself in the hour of mortal battle!

"Come out of that!" said Sergei Sergeyevich, putting his hand on Ivan Ilyich's shoulder. "It's sheer idealism, Ivan, to stand there seeing pictures in the clouds. . . . Shall we roll a cigarette? I stole a packet of tobacco in the hospital, I'm keeping it to smoke just before dying. . . ."

As ever, his voice was mocking, though there was melancholy hidden away in the wrinkles round his mouth, and in his dim eyes. Each rolled himself a cigarette and lit up, Te-

legin smoking without inhaling, Sapozhkov breathing in the smoke, gasping.

"What are you harping on death for?" asked Telegin in a low voice.

"I've begun to fear death.... I'm afraid of a bullet in my brain. It might not be fatal anywhere else, but I *am* afraid for my head. The head isn't just a target, it was made for something better. I can't bear my thoughts to be lost...."

"Everyone's afraid of death, Sergei Sergeyevich—but it's no good thinking of it...."

"You never troubled to ask yourself what my thoughts were. Sapozhkov's an anarchist, Sapozhkov swills vodka—that's all you know about me.... I can see right through you, as if you were made of glass, I'd be able to hand on your message to those who survive, but you couldn't do the same for me. And that's a pity.... Oh, Ivan, how I envy you!"

"What d'you find to envy in me?"

"You're so transparent: duty, devoted love, self-criticism. Most faithful servant, kindest of fellows. And your wife will adore you when she settles down. Another reason why you find life simple is that you're such an old-fashioned type."

"Thanks for the testimonial!"

"As for me, Ivan, I'm sorry Gimza didn't shoot me last summer.... We awaited the revolution, trembling with impatience.... We flung a whole bundle of ideas at the world: here it was, the golden age of philosophy, the loftiest freedom! And in reality—disaster, the most appalling disaster...."

The end of the sentence was lost in a string of obscenities.

He smote his forehead so violently that his cap slipped on to the back of his head....

"I should like to be able to make a statement on this point to the whole of humanity—no less an audience will do... a fiendish statement, not to do good—to hell with that!—to do harm.... But there's no manuscript, I haven't written it yet.... Sorry...."

It was already dark. Fires were burning on the horizon—the smoky crimson glow was spreading upwards and outwards, especially in the south, towards Sarepta. Farmsteads were burning, lighting up the path of the rapidly advancing enemy. Telegin was now listening with half an ear, for far

away in the west, green rockets were darting up in groups of three over the horizon, like snakes with luminous heads.

Sergei Sergeyevich went on talking in a trembling voice as if stubbornly resolved not to remark this pyrotechnical display, which made Telegin's skin creep despite himself.

"Or do we live only for the sake of eating? In that case, let the bullet shatter my skull, and let my brains, which I quite erroneously supposed to be as big as the universe, vanish like a soap bubble. . . . Life, you see, is a cycle of carbon plus a cycle of nitrogen, plus some other rubbish. . . . From simple molecules are formed complex ones, very complex, and then terrifically complex. . . . Then—it all bursts. Nitrogen, carbon and the other rubbish begin to revert to their most elementary state. That's all. That's all, Ivan. . . . What has all this to do with revolution?"

"What rubbish you talk, Sergei Sergeyevich! It's precisely the revolution that raises man above the ruck. . . ."

"Leave me alone! It's not you I'm talking to—a fat lot you understand about the revolution! It's all over—crushed—can't you see an inch before your nose? Soviet Russia is no larger than Russia before the time of Ivan the Terrible. . . . The highways will soon be white with bones. . . . And then the carbon-and-nitrogen cycles will flourish—I mean those fellows who will come galloping up tomorrow morning. . . ."

Telegin stood silent and erect, his hands clasped behind his back. It was hard to make out the expression of his face, over which the glow of the fire cast a reddish tinge.

"Ivan. . . . The only thing worth living for is some fantastic future, some great, permanent liberty, when there shall be nobody and nothing to prevent each individual from feeling himself the equal of the whole universe. . . . The nights I've spent talking about this to my chaps! The stars shining over their heads were the same as those which shone over the great Homer. . . . The campfires were the same as those which have lit up the way from time immemorial. . . . The fellows listened when I told them about the future, the stars were reflected in their eyes, and the flames were reflected in their bayonets. . . . And now they all lie dead in the steppe. . . . I did not lead my regiment to victory. . . . I deceived them, that's what it comes to."

About fifty yards to the right the challenge of a sentry could be heard, followed by low-voiced conversation. Telegin

turned his head and looked in the direction of the sound. It must be one of the men speaking to Gagin, who was on sentry duty on the other side.

"Supposing this future is just a fairy tale, Ivan, just a tale told in the remote steppes of Russia! Supposing there's no such thing! If so, then horror will stalk the earth." Sapozhkov moved right up to Telegin, and continued in a whisper. "Horror has come, and nobody really believes it yet. Horror is only beginning to measure its strength against the foe. The four years of the slaughter of humanity is nothing to what is coming. The destruction of the revolution here, and all over the world—that's the main thing.... And after that—the universal mobilization of individuality, shaven heads and fettered wrists.... And horror, inflated, triumphant, over the grey ashes of the world.... Better for me to perish at once from the sharp thrust of a Cossack sword...."

"Why, Sergei Sergeyevich, what you need is rest and medical treatment," said Telegin.

"I knew that was all you'd have to say to me!"

Gagin was descending into the hollow, accompanied by a tall, stoop-shouldered military man. Telegin was infinitely relieved to be delivered from the painful argument. The newcomer was fairly plastered with mud, and the hem of his greatcoat was badly torn. On his head, strangely enough, was a Cossack army cap. His voice was congested, as if he had been up to his neck in a bog a whole week.

"Greetings, Comrade Commander! How are things with you—plenty of shells?"

"Greetings!" responded Telegin. "And who may you be?"

"I've come with a company from the Kachalin Regiment—sent to occupy a position in front of you. I'm the commander."

"Delighted! I was getting a bit nervous—there are the trenches, and nobody to occupy them...."

"We've come to occupy them. We've brought some wounded, we'll be entraining them. We asked the commandant for bread, but he says there won't be any till tomorrow. That's all very well, but the company has had nothing to eat for three days. You haven't got any, have you? If we could give them a slice of bread each, just for them to get the smell of food.... We'd return it tomorrow ... or we could let you have a cow, if you like."

"Ivan Ilyich!"

Telegin turned towards the voice. Anisya had crept up as noiselessly as a shadow, and had overheard the conversation. "I've laid on enough for three days," she said. "We could let them have some.... I'll get some more tomorrow...."

Telegin gave a short laugh.

"Very well! Give the Comrade Commander a few loaves...."

The Company Commander had not for a moment expected to be given bread so easily.

"Really?" he exclaimed. "Thanks awfully!" He tucked the loaves Anisya brought him beneath his armpits, but did not like to make off with them instantly. The sailors started up, stiff-limbed with sleep, to have a look at this ragged and dirty individual. He began telling them of the exploits of his regiment, which had been ten days breaking through enemy encirclement, without losing a single gun, or a single cart of wounded. But his speech was so broken and incoherent, that several of the sailors turned away with impatient gestures.

"Have a sleep first, then tell us," said Latugin, casting a cold glance at him. "By the way, can you tell us the meaning of that bright light over there?" He threw out his arm in the direction of Sarepta.

"Yes, I can," said Ivan Gora, "I met a man who had just come from there at the station. General Denisov is storming Sarepta. They say there never was such a terrific bombardment—not even in the German war. The artillery are sweeping everything before them. The Cossacks are pouring out of the gullies—you never saw anything like it! They're fairly foaming at the mouths.... It's a massacre—no prisoners taken.... Only half of Morozov's division left.... And the enemy pushing on to the Volga. He hopes to get there between Sarepta and Chapurniki, you see—and then it'll be all up with us!"

He nodded to the sailors and clambered back out of the hollow.

"Who's in command of your regiment?" Telegin shouted after him.

"Pyotr Nikolayevich Melshin!" shouted Ivan Gora back through the darkness.

All night and throughout the following day, Morozov's division, hard pressed by Denisov's fifth column, retreated slowly in the direction of Sarepta and the lake village of Chapurniki. Hundreds of dead bodies were strewn over the plain. General Denisov gave his opponents not a moment's respite. Every attack beaten off by the Reds was immediately followed by another. Shells burst, whining over the trenches; the ground was shaken with explosions, men were buried beneath fountains of earth. Whenever the Cossack guns fell silent for a moment, the Red Army men raised blood-stained faces, distorted with rage and pain, out of the trenches.

Suddenly flocks of horsemen emerged from gullies, from over hilltops, spreading out on the gallop, in deploy formation, the dust whirling in eddies beneath the horses' hoofs. . . . Waving their swords, they emitted wild shrieks. Tatar fashion.

If a single man had quailed, had fled terror-stricken from the avalanche of powerful chestnut horses with the black figures of their riders bending low over their manes in their eagerness to bathe their blades in warm blood, the line would have been broken, the men cut to pieces and trampled underfoot. . . .

The flanks of Morozov's division, beaten right back to the orchards of Sarepta and the barns of the village of Chapurniki, were holding out courageously, but the central sector sagged towards the Volga, as inevitably as the muscles of the arm give beneath overwhelming pressure. And it was precisely here, in the front lines of the central sector, that the Divisional Commander, the Commissar, the aide and orderlies, were to be found, squatting behind the recumbent bodies of their horses. The Commander was continually filling the places of the fallen by ever-thinning reinforcements from the flanks. He did not ask the Army Commander for reinforcements, knowing that there were no reserves to be found in Tsaritsyn.

That morning an unfortunate incident had occurred in the main line of defence: the 1st and 2nd Peasant Regiments, which had been recruited from nearby farmsteads and villages, had suddenly clambered out of the trenches, and, raising their rifles above their heads, started going over to

the Whites. A few commanders from the staff of the First Peasant Regiment who were standing about near the field kitchen, suddenly surrounded the Commissar of the regiment and some Communists, and shot them at close range. In the Second Peasant Regiment, the Commander, the Commissar, and a few Communists were shot down by the insurgents at the same time. Only two companies remained loyal and fired at the traitors, who ran towards the enemy with white flags. Mamontov's troops, who witnessed the whole thing from afar, took the fleeing groups for an attacking force, and opened devastating fire on them. The remains of the two peasant regiments, losing their heads, threw down their rifles and rushed back, only to be surrounded and taken to the rear. But the front was exposed for a distance of almost four miles.

In Tsaritsyn the sirens sounded the alarm at the ordnance and engineering works, and at all the sawmills. The Communists, sent by the Military Council, went from shop to shop, saying:

"Comrades, leave your work, take up arms, and save the front!"

The workers—and by that time there were only old men, cripples, and boys left in the factories—put away their tools, stopped the machinery, put out the furnaces, and ran to the storerooms, where each had his own rifle. They drew up at the factory gates and marched to the station.

Wives and mothers rushed out from the little dwellings on the outskirts of the town, to thrust little packets of food into the hands of their husbands and sons; many of them followed the straggling ranks to the station, some went still further—right up to the lines—where they stood on the mounds for a long time, until the Commander of the Army begged them, his hand on his heart, to go home—not only were they not needed here, they were actually in the way, their figures on the mounds affording splendid targets for Mamontov's gun layers.

Before evening had set in, the three thousand Tsaritsyn workers had bridged the gap which the Whites had already begun to break through, and had thrown the enemy back at the cost of heavy losses to themselves.

This happened just when Morozov's division was sustaining a joint cavalry and infantry attack of extraordinary

violence. The units of the central sector of the division were driven back almost to the very banks of the Volga. Shells were already bursting in the streets of Sarepta. The village of Chapurniki had caught fire, the flames were devouring the thatched roofs, and had even spread to the reeds beside the low-lying steppe lake.

The Red Divisional Commander was scanning the plain through his field glasses. The sun was beginning to sink below the horizon.

The Cossack squadrons came and went under his very eyes, without taking the slightest trouble to conceal their movements. His experienced eye, noting the friskiness of the horses, told him that these were fresh units, preparing for a final attack. By sundown, he said to himself, the entire Morozov Division, its commander at its head, will have begun its grim march across the pages of history.

Letting go of the field glasses, he pulled a short, blackened pipe out of his pocket, cramming a pinch of home-grown Saratov tobacco into the bowl with leisurely movements, and began patting the pockets of his greatcoat in search of matches. But there were no matches in any one of them. He looked to the right and left of him—ahead lay his men, each with a little mound of earth in front of him: one had a black spot spreading slowly over his shirt, another, giving imbecile grunts, was rubbing his cheek on his rifle stock.

The Divisional Commander let his pipe slide through his fingers to the ground, where it rolled away into the wormwood. He picked up the field glasses again. And his hands suddenly began to shake. . . . Enormous, fresh accumulations of cavalry were visible in the southwest. . . . They must have come up while he was filling his pipe. . . . Thousands of horsemen were emerging from behind the low hills, the dust from their horses' hoofs irradiated by the slanting rays of the sun. "A force like that could knock us into a cocked hat!" reflected the Divisional Commander, and tore himself away from the field glasses for a moment. A tense stillness prevailed in the trenches, where the men were standing bolt upright, tightly clutching their rifles. The Divisional Commander was just going to open his mouth for a passionate utterance, when his ears caught the distant rumble of artillery.

Once more he pressed the field glasses to his eyes. What

the hell was that? Shells were bursting by the dozen over the plain in the neighbourhood of the advancing Cossack squadrons, which immediately began to deploy at a fast trot, the banner of the ataman gleaming in their midst. Then they swung round to meet the impetuous descent of this cavalry host. The dense Cossack formations, their lances bristling, backed their horses, and then suddenly urged them forward, and the opposing forces met and grappled. Over the place of their encounter hung a huge cloud of dust.

The Divisional Commander, readjusting the prisms of his binoculars to cover a field of vision nearer to himself, now saw the Cossack infantry rise in panic from the ground where they had been lying prone.

"Oho!" said the Commander to himself, "so that's why the Chairman of the Military Council was so insistent over the telephone about holding out to the last drop of blood.... This must be Dmitri Shelest's Iron Division...."

From beyond the hills, on the heels of the cavalry which had descended upon the Cossacks, came the infantry of the Iron Division. And behind them, right on the horizon, camels, carts and a surging throng could be discerned through the dust. These were the huge supply trains of the division, which, as it subsequently appeared, were bringing with them tons of wheat, barrels of spirits, innumerable refugees, and flocks of cows and sheep.

Many a Cossack laid down his life in this battle. The routed White cavalry retreated westward, while the infantry, trapped between the Iron Division and Morozov's division, was in part annihilated, in part taken prisoner. The battle lasted about an hour, and when all was over the Divisional Commander mounted his horse and rode slowly over the plain, which was strewn with the bodies of men and horses. The ground was still smouldering in places, and here and there moans came from wounded men not yet picked up by the stretcher-bearers. A group of horsemen were riding to meet the Divisional Commander. One of their number, in Kuban dress, with rows of cartridge loops on his coat, a huge dagger thrust into his belt in front, and the ends of a hood dangling over his shoulders at the back, urged on his horse and galloped towards the Divisional Commander. As soon as he got up to him he reined in his horse and said, in harsh, authoritative tones:

"Greetings, Comrade! Who am I addressing?"

"You are addressing the Commander of the Morozov Don Division. Good day, Comrade! And who may you be?"

"Who may I be?" chuckled the horseman. "Have a good look! I am the man the Commander of the 11th Army declared an outlaw, the man who was to be shot at Nevinno-mysskaya, and here I am, you see, arrived at Tsaritsyn, and none too soon, apparently."

The boastful reply did not particularly appeal to the Divisional Commander, who frowned, and said:

"You must be Dmitri Shelest. . . ."

"That's what I've always been called. Now then—show me where I can telephone the Military Council!"

"I have spoken to them—the Military Council knows everything."

"What do I care what *you* said—let them hear *my* voice!" answered Dmitri Shelest haughtily, spurring his coal-black stallion so violently that it bore him away at a furious gallop.

* VII *

Late in the evening of the same day, Ivan Ilyich sent a note to Colonel Melshin: "Pyotr Nikolayevich, I am here, and should very much like to see you. . . ." Melshin sent his reply by the same messenger: "Delighted, I'll come the moment I'm ready. I have much to tell you. . . . By the way, your. . . ."

Either Melshin's pencil must have broken here, or he had been writing in the dark, for Ivan Ilyich could not make out the concluding words, though he wasted several matches in the attempt. . . .

But Melshin did not come. The steppe was lit up with rockets after midnight, and the order to stand by was received by the battery.

"Now then, Comrades, this is the beginning," said Ivan Ilyich to his men. "Well then—in the first place, remember, not a single shell must be wasted. . . . and then, you know, we mustn't forget the order of the Army Commander—not a step in retreat except on special instructions! And then—well, anything may happen in battle, and if. . . . (What the hell do I have to stick in all those 'well thens' for?" he asked

himself.) "In 1915 they posted machine guns behind us, the generals didn't believe the peasants would give their lives for their Father, the tsar.... And yet, though they cursed tsar Nikolai in the trenches, they did feel that Russia was their native land.... There has never been anything more formidable than the Russian bayonet attacks were...."

"What are you trying to tell us, Commander?" Latugin broke in huskily. "What's it all about? Eh?"

Ivan Ilyich went on talking, as if he had not heard him:

"There are no machine guns at our back today.... Each one of us would consider it worse than death to betray the revolution ... simply to save his own skin.... This is how we must interpret the order of the Army Commander to stand firm at the decisive moment, when the earth is seething beneath our feet.... They say there are men who do not know the meaning of fear, but that's nonsense. Fear does exist, it does lift its head—and it is for us to wring its neck every time. We should fear disgrace more than we do death. And I say this, Comrade Latugin, because there are comrades among us who have not yet tested their strength in real battles.... And there are some comrades with weak nerves.... Even a veteran fighter loses his head sometimes.... So I want you to know that if I, your commander, were to lose my nerve and, for example, desert the battery, I order you to shoot me on the spot.... And I myself will shoot anybody I find attempting the same thing.... Well, that's all.... There must be no smoking before daybreak...."

He coughed and paced up and down behind the guns for a few moments. There was so much he would have liked to say, but somehow he could not bring it out....

"I didn't say there must be no *talking*, Comrades...."

"Comrade Telegin!" It was Latugin again, and Telegin went up to him, his hands folded behind him. "Comrade Telegin, before I joined the army I went about the world—ragged, barefoot, quarrelsome.... I worked as a stevedore, I chopped wood for merchants, cleaned latrines; I was once a groom at the bishop's, but I quarrelled with His Reverence because the soup was thin. At one time I got in with thieves.... I've been everywhere! And what a fool I was, what a brawler! When I was drunk I was beaten within an inch of my life again and again...."

"All because of the wenches, I bet!" interpolated Baikov, and the faint light of a distant rocket made his small teeth gleam between his thick moustache and beard.

"Sometimes it was on account of wenches...but that's not the point. This is what I want to say: you left out the main thing, Comrade Telegin—you only beat about the bush... Revolutionary duty—that's right, of course. But what makes us undertake this duty voluntarily? Answer that! You can't? You haven't eaten the food we had to eat. We've been boiled in caustic, we've had our very souls shaken out of us. You'd think not even an animal would stand what we've had to put up with. In our place you'd have bent your neck to the yoke long ago, and pulled the load obediently... Now don't get offended, can't we talk as man to man? Why did my mother have to work herself to the bone for others? Was she any worse than the Queen of Greece?"

"There he goes!" groaned Baikov. "It was way back in 1913, in Athens, that we saw the Queen of Greece! Why hark back to her?"

"Why did my father live like a pig, until the gendarmes knocked him down one day, and spat on him? Why am I called son-of-a-bitch?"

"This won't do!" said Sharigin, rising from his knees, where he had been squatting in his place beside a heap of shells. "You can't hold forth in this unsystematic way, Latugin. What's all this about son-of-a-bitch and the Queen of Greece? That's all just superstructure. The real point is the class struggle. You must make up your mind who you are—a proletarian, or a declassed element..."

"To hell with you! I'm the lord of creation!" shouted Latugin. "Can you grasp that, or are you still too young? I read in a book where it said: 'Man is the lord of creation.' And that's why I am standing here beside this gun. The lord of creation lives within us. Duty, duty, fear, fear! It's the Lord God himself I'm after today, and not simply General Mamontov—there's superstructure for you! I'll gnaw his bones..."

"Quiet there, Comrades!" shouted Sergei Sergeyevich from where he was seated at the field telephone. "Listen! We have scored a great victory at Sarepta. Two cavalry regiments and a Cossack infantry regiment have been routed, one-and-a-half thousand enemy soldiers killed, eight hundred prisoners..."

The news of the victory at Sarepta spread along the front like wildfire. It happened that a unit of the 10th Army—Budyonny's cavalry brigade—cut off from the main body by the fifth column of the White army, was trying to break through to Tsaritsyn from the Salsk steppe. The march had been extremely onerous, and men and horses were exhausted. But somebody at a railway halt by the merest fluke got the Morozov headquarters on the line, and a gay voice, interspersing his words with many a salty idiom, barked into the receiver: "Are you asleep? Don't you know two cavalry divisions of those vermin have been chopped up for cat's meat at Sarepta? Come over and help count the prisoners!" And the whole brigade, at this glorious, if greatly exaggerated news, left its carts of wounded and its baggage trains under a guard, and made a hundred-mile march northward, to meet General Denisov's vermin.

But after all, the victory at Sarepta was only a local one, and made the situation on the main positions around Tsaritsyn harder and not easier. Mamontov, rapidly adapting his tactics to the lucky occurrence with the two peasant regiments, reorganized his storm columns overnight, and at daybreak transferred the whole weight of his attack to this, the most vulnerable four miles of the front, which was only feebly protected by workers' volunteer detachments.

The plain over which the flower of the Don Army was advancing was intersected from east to west by two gullies, huge and deep, which cut across the front and extended right to the town. It was along these gullies that the Cossack cavalry were making their way right up to the Red trenches. The whole plain seemed to be covered with slowly moving anthills. This was the infantry creeping forward. In front of it, huge tanks crawled blindly backwards and forwards. Above the batteries and the supply carts which were moving over the steppe into and out of Tsaritsyn, circled aircraft, dropping small pear-shaped bombs which exploded with appalling force.

Mamontov's own armoured train was sending out clouds of smoke on the horizon. To the right and left of it the whole steppe was covered by village carts. Their axles almost touching, they pressed forward close on the heels of the troops. The Cossack traders could already see the town with its domes and factory chimneys, and the smoke rising from

fires on the outskirts. How the eyes gleamed beneath the bushy brows of these men, whose very skins were permeated with the smell of smoke, lard, and tar.

Shells flew hurtling over the steppe with a terrific down draught, thunderously encircling the Red positions with continually rising and falling fountains of earth. Cavalry poured out of the deep gullies with wild yells, looking neither to right nor to left; jumping their steeds across the barbed-wire entanglements, they galloped towards the trenches in such an intoxication of fury that when a bullet landed in a horseman's body, he went on slashing the air with his sword at the gallop even in the darkness of death, till he slumped down in the saddle, flinging out his arms as if in a paroxysm of crazy laughter, and rolling off the terrified, rearing horse.

The infantry lines crept up, and suddenly lunged forward. Cavalry and infantry mingled in hand-to-hand fighting at the Red trenches. On that day Mamontov had ordered that all Cossacks should tie white ribbons round the bands of their army caps, to prevent them from attacking each other in the heat of battle. And the fighting was still more savage and desperate in that Russians were fighting against Russians—on one side for the sake of some unknown new way of life, on the other in order that the old way should remain inviolate.

Again and again the waves of attack were repulsed, driven back by the miniature armoured trains of the Reds. Hastily assembled at the Tsaritsyn factories, these trains consisted of two petrol tanks, or two freight trucks with an engine in the middle. They ran on a circular track on both sides of the front. They plunged into the very thick of the fight, with their machine guns and cannon. Squeezing the last ounce out of the tiny, ancient engines, they dashed over the twisted rails, through bursting shells and the clouds of steam rising from the bullet-riddled sides, carrying water, bread and ammunition to the trenches.

"Down!"

Close by came such an explosion that the light darkened before men's eyes, and their chests seemed to be caving in, and the next moment falling sods came pelting down on their backs, and on their heads, which they attempted to protect by covering them with their hands.

"To the guns! To your places!" cried Telegin, leaping to his feet, and vaguely discerning through the cloud of dust a battered gun, one of its wheels sticking up into the air, and men rushing furiously towards it... *Everyone alive—Latugin, Baikov, Gagin, Zaduviter—where's Sharigin? Oh, there he is! The other gun's undamaged, and there's Pechenkin, Vlasov ... why is Ivanov shaking his head? ...*

"Left! Six, eighty! Sight, six, nought, battery fire!" croaked Sapozhkov, leaning out of the half-filled dugout, the telephone receiver pressed to his ear.

Coughing from the dust, Telegin repeated the order. Sharigin tossed a shell over to Baikov, who examined the fuse and in his turn tossed it to Gagin, who was loading the gun. Zaduviter opened the breechblock and Latugin laid the gun, and raised his hand.

"Fire!"

The barrels of the guns jerked violently, and the shells zoomed out... The hasty movements of the men ceased abruptly, like a film breaking off in mid-action... There it came ... again the lunging shadow, the thunderbolt burying itself in the earth beside them.

"Down!"

And once again the thunder, eruption, suffocation... The men felt as if their very veins were bursting with rage... But what was to be done, when on the other side there were shells in plenty, while their own were fast dwindling away, and the cock-eyed fool up in the observation post seemed unable to get the range of the enemy's battery...

This time Latugin was hit. He sat on the ground, gritting his teeth in his agony. Anisya was beside him, removing his jacket and singlet, with light, agile fingers, and bandaging his shoulder. Where she could have sprung from nobody knew. "Come my dear," she was saying, stooping over him. "I'll help you to the dressing station." But Latugin, stripped to the waist, streaming with blood, pushed Anisya aside and flung himself, bristling and snarling, as if really gnawing somebody's bones, upon the gun.

At last there came appeasement for the rage which had been seething so intolerably in the hearts of all for so many hours—ever since the beginning of this unequal artillery duel. Sapozhkov had just answered the enquiry of the battalion commander as to the number of shells left, and was in his

turn awaiting a reply. From his inflamed eyelids there trickled dirt-laden tears, and every now and then he removed the receiver from his ear and blew into it. The very air suddenly seemed different, as if something had happened—the stillness seemed to ring in men's ears. Telegin crawled anxiously on his stomach to the parapet, just in time to witness what was evidently the beginning of a determined general attack. The dark masses of Cossack cavalry and infantry could be discerned with the naked eye, and here and there in their midst the glittering of gilded banners, showing that the priests brought to the battlefield on automobiles were blessing the troops in the very sight of the Red batteries. . . .

The sailors, too, leaned over the parapet. Their heavy breathing could be heard. Baikov tried to make them laugh.

"Come on, let's fire at the angels over open sights!"

Nobody laughed. Latugin said abruptly, peremptorily:

"Commander—why not take the gun out into the open? What's the good of huddling here like rats in a hole?"

"We can't do it without horses, Latugin."

"Oh, yes, we can!"

"How dare you argue with the Commander on the field! It's anarchy!" shouted Sharigin, with such sudden, childish rudeness that the sailors cast unfriendly glances at him. He picked up a handful of sand in each fist and began furiously rubbing it into his cheeks. Then he went back to his appointed place, and stood motionless, but for the flutter of his lashes over his roughened cheeks.

Telegin dropped from the parapet, and went up to the gun, putting his hand on one of the wheels.

"Latugin's proposal is a good one, Comrades," he said. "We might as well try and dig away some earth."

The sailors, who had been following his movements attentively, silently flung themselves upon their spades and began digging a slope in the side of the hollow at a place convenient for dragging the gun out into the open.

"Telegin!" shouted Sapozhkov in hoarse, strained tones. "Telegin, the Commander wants to know if it is possible to wheel the gun out into the open without horses."

"Tell him it is."

Telegin said this with calm confidence. Latugin, digging away in spite of the burning pain in his wounded shoulder,

where the blood was seeping through the bandage, nudged Baikov:

"What price the intellectuals, eh!"

"They'll learn to carry water in a sieve next," replied Baikov. "They'll have learned something from the common people, in the end!"

Suddenly the stillness was rent by the thunder of hurricane fire. Telegin dashed to the parapet. Troops were pouring into the plain. To the right, cutting across their advance, the armoured trains of Alabyev (a commander who earned fame by that day's work), dashed along the low-lying track, hooting, puffing, emitting clouds of tawny smoke. Telegin's attention was fixed upon the nearest covering unit, a company of the Kachalin Regiment lying on the other side of the barbed wire in the merest holes in the ground doing duty for trenches. A barrel of water had just been driven up to them, but the horse took fright and shied, overturning the barrel, and galloping away with the cart. Telegin caught sight of his eccentric visitor of the day before—the lanky Ivan Gora, running along the trench in a crouching position, apparently giving out the last clip to each man....

To the left of the company's position, and that of Telegin's battery, about a quarter-of-a-mile away, was the gully which ran right through the front to the town. The gully had been under fire all day, and the Cossacks could be seen deploying in the distance, and overflowing its sides. Ivan Ilyich, observing the increasing tensiety among the men of Ivan Gora's company, realized that the Cossacks were sure to advance further down the gully, so as to attack the trenches from the rear, using a flank movement against the battery, and that the result would be havoc. And his surmise proved correct....

Horsemen suddenly dashed out of the gully quite close to the Red positions and scattered in opposite directions—one party moving to the rear of Ivan Gora, the other galloping towards the battery. Telegin rushed to the guns. The sailors, panting and swearing, were dragging a gun out of the hollow on to a rising. The wheels kept sticking in the shifting sand.

"Cossacks!" said Telegin, trying to speak calmly. "Haul her out!" And he gripped the wheel with such force that the

muscles of his back seemed to be snapping. "Hurry up! Grapeshot!"

The savage yells of the Cossacks, as of men being flayed alive, could already be heard. Gagin got under the gun carriage and hoisted it on to his shoulders: "All together, now!" The gun heaved itself out of the sand, and slumped on to the mound, its muzzle pointing downwards. Gagin picked up a shell in his huge hands, feeding it into the breech with movements which were almost leisurely. Some thirty horsemen, bending low over their horses' manes, and brandishing their sabres, galloped up to the battery. Met by a long tongue of flame and a burst of grapeshot, some of the horses reared, and some turned tail, but about a dozen of the riders, unable to hold their horses in, dashed up to the mound.

At last the pent-up fury of the sailors found a vent. Latugin, naked to the waist, shouting hoarsely, was the first to fling himself upon the enemy, and thrust his crooked dirk beneath the embossed belt of a Cossack's black tunic.... Zaduviter fell under a horse's hoofs, impatiently ripped its belly open, and before the Cossack could slip to the ground, stabbed him, too, with his dirk. Gagin, evading a sword thrust, came to grips with a sturdy cornet—the Novgorod man against the man from the Don—whom he dragged from his horse, and knocked down, while retaining a deadly grip on his body. The rest fired their carbines under cover of the gun. Telegin, with the slow, calm movements characteristic of him in such moments (emotion would come later, after the event), fired systematically, without removing his finger from the trigger. The fight was soon over; four Cossacks lay dead on the mound, and two were shot endeavouring to escape on foot.

The last attack was beaten off like all the preceding ones on that day. The enemy was unable to break through the Red front, except where an infantry column had driven a deep wedge between two Red divisions at their most vulnerable spot. It was already dark. The barrels of the guns were red-hot, the horses were half-dead with fatigue, the fury of the cavalry abated, and it was getting more and more difficult for the enemy to send the infantry over the top. The battle came to an end, the shots died out over the plain,

where now only the stretcher-bearers crept, picking up the wounded.

Barrels of water, and carts loaded with bread and water-melons arrived at the battery and trenches, taking the wounded with them on their way back. The losses in all units of the 10th Army were appalling. But still worse than these was the fact that all reserves had been called up on this day, and there were no more to come from the town.

The Army Commander rode up to the passenger coach drawn up just outside the station of Voroponovo. Slowly dismounting, he glanced from one to the other of the men hastening to meet him. These were the Army Artillery Commander, who turned out to be the tall, rosy-cheeked, bearded individual who had come to talk to the townspeople at Telegin's battery, and Alabyev, the Commander of the Armoured Trains, who looked like a student just returning, flushed with excitement, from the barricades. Both comrades met his glance with a smile: they were glad to see him come back from the front lines, where, that day, the Army Commander had done his part in more than one bayonet charge. There was a bullet hole in his coat, and the butt of the carbine slung across his shoulder was smashed.

The Army Commander went into the saloon car, and asked for a drink. After drinking several mugs of water, he asked for a cigarette. He drew a few puffs, but just as a film was beginning to dim his burning eyes he placed the cigarette on the edge of the table, pulled a sheaf of reports towards him, and bent over them. Yes . . . the losses had been heavy, terribly heavy, and there were very few munitions left for the next day—desperately few. He spread out a map, and all three bent over it. The Commander slowly traced a line with a stump of pencil—it only showed a few insignificant breaks as a result of the day's fighting, and at Sarepta there was actually a bend running far into the White lines. But at the sector where there had been the unfortunate incident with the peasant regiments the day before, the line of the front turned back sharply towards Tsaritsyn. The Army Commander's pencil moved slower and slower. "Come now," he said. "Let's go over it once more." Yes, the reports were accurate. The pencil paused about six miles from Tsaritsyn, in the very bed of the gully, and turned abruptly backwards to the west. A wedge was formed. The Commander threw

the pencil on to the map and brought the back of his hand down on this wedge.

"This is the decisive sector."

The Artillery Commander said obstinately, frowning and looking away.

"I'll undertake to eat up that wedge if I can get enough shells during the night."

The Commander of the Armoured Trains said: "The morale of the troops is high: if they can get some food and a few hours' sleep, we shall hold out."

"It's not enough to hold out," said the Army Commander. "We must smash them, and the line of the front is unfavourable for that. Is the engine coupled? All right, I'll be going, then...."

He remained sitting for a few moments, as if weighed down with fatigue, but then rose and threw his arms round the shoulders of his comrades:

"Well, good luck!" ...

The Army Artillery Commander and the Commander of the Armoured Trains returned to the observation post—a solitary railway water tower which had been under intense fire from land and air all day. Climbing to its top, where telephones had been installed, they found that their supper had been sent up—two slices of stale bread and half an unripe watermelon for the two of them. The Army Artillery Commander was a robust, cheerful fellow, and the sight of such meagre rations pained him.

"Call that a melon?" he said, standing in front of an opening made in the brick wall. "If you have to use a knife to a melon, it's no good—a melon should break when you thump it with your fist." Spitting out the seeds, and narrowing his eyes, he looked out on to the plain below, which was visible for miles around beneath the rays of the setting sun. "A bowl of hot dumplings—*that* would fill one up! What d'you think, Vasili—it looks as if there'll be an order to retreat tonight. ..."

"Retreat? Give up the circuit railway? Are you mad?"

"And weren't you mad when you allowed the enemy to break through—what were your armoured trains doing?"

While the Army Artillery Commander was speaking, he

every now and then raised two outward-slanting fingers to his eye, or, holding a box of matches before him at arm's length, guessed at angles and distances to within about fifty feet.

"Well, they had combat engineers following and blowing up the tracks in a dozen places."

"Still you oughtn't to have let them make a wedge," insisted the Commander of Artillery. "I say, look here! Do you notice anything?"

Only a keen, trained eye could have discerned that the brown plain, stretching westwards, was no longer so deserted and quiet, that some kind of cautious movement was going on on its surface. Every unevenness in the ground, every hillock cast long shadows on the ground, like thousands of ant heaps, but certain of these shadows were slowly changing their position.

"Relief troops," said the Army Artillery Commander. "They're crawling up, the beauties.... Take my glasses.... See those little strips glittering?"

"I see them clearly. They look like officers' shoulder straps."

"Officers' shoulder straps—that's what they are. Look at them, damn them! They're crawling like spiders! Funny there should be such a lot of officers' shoulder straps.... There doesn't seem to be anything else...."

"It is funny!"

"Stalin told us only the day before yesterday to be on the lookout for this. And probably that's just what it is...."

Alabyev glanced at the speaker. He had removed his cap, and was scratching his head, ruffling up the matted hair; the light had died out of his grey eyes, his head was bowed.

"Yes," he murmured. "Now I understand why they stopped so early today. It was to be expected. It'll be hard."

Moving briskly to a chair by the telephone he made a few calls. Then, shoving his cap on to the back of his head, he rushed headlong down the spiral stairway.

The chief of the artillery stood watching the plain till the sun had set. Then he called up the Military Council and said into the receiver, in low, clear tones:

"The Cossacks are being relieved by an officers' brigade, Comrade Stalin."

To which he got the reply:

"I know. You'll soon have a dispatch."

And indeed, the stuttering noise of a motorcycle back-firing was very soon heard. Steps clattered on the creaking stairway, and a man dressed entirely in black leather struggled out of the hatch. The Artillery Commander was a fairly tall man, but the motorcyclist towered above him.

"Where can I find the Army Artillery Commander?"

The reply: "I'm the Army Artillery Commander," did not satisfy the motorcyclist, who insisted on further identification, reading the paper handed to him by the light of a match, which he held till it burned down to his finger tips. Only then, with every sign of distrust, did he hand over the dispatch and stamp down the stairs.

The envelope contained a folded scrap of coarse-grained yellow paper, on which was written in the hand of the Chairman of the Military Council:

"Concentrate all available artillery" (the word "all" was underlined) "and ammunition, before daybreak on a four-mile sector in the Voroponovo-Sadovaya area. Every possible care must be taken to avoid attracting the attention of the enemy during the transfer."

The Artillery Commander read and reread the unexpected and terrible order. Risky in the extreme, its fulfilment would be fraught with immense difficulties, for it meant neither more nor less than the concentration on a tiny sector (the wedge-shaped area of the enemy breakthrough), of all twenty-seven batteries—two hundred guns. And what if the enemy should take it into his head not to strike precisely there, but a thought to the right or left, or, still worse, attack the flank at Sarepta and Gumrak! Then—encirclement, and utter annihilation!

Profoundly disturbed, the Artillery Commander seated himself before the telephone and began calling up the battalion commanders, telling them which paths to follow, and where to move their huge and cumbrous outfits: thousands of men, horses, army carts, farm wagons, tents, to be loaded, dispatched, moved, unloaded, set up in the new place, the guns to be dug in, wires to be stretched—and all in the few hours before dawn.

Without moving from the telephone, he shouted down for a lantern, and for all dispatch riders to have their mounts in readiness. Unbuttoning the collar of his cloth tunic, he

passed a hand over his shaven skull, and dictated brief orders. The dispatch riders, receiving them, hurled themselves down the stairs of the water tower, sprang into the saddle, and galloped into the night. The Artillery Commander was wily—he gave orders that fires should be lit on the abandoned battery positions. Not big ones, just enough to give a natural glow—let the enemy think the Reds were warming their bare feet round a fire in the cold night.

Reading through the dispatch once more, he decided that it would not do to leave the flanks completely exposed, and made up his mind to leave thirty guns at Sarepta and Gumrak after all. When the battalion commanders reported that the teams were ready, the shells and first-aid equipment, loaded, and that fires had been lit here and there, as he had ordered, the Army Artillery Commander got into the old car which ran on a mixture of spirits and petrol, its body rattling like a gipsy wagon, and drove to headquarters at Tsaritsyn.

Thundering through the streets of the dark, deserted town, he stopped in front of the merchant's mansion in which headquarters was housed, dashed up the unlighted staircase to the second floor, and entered a big room with mullioned windows and an oak ceiling, two candles its sole illumination—one on the long table, cluttered with papers, the other held high in the hand of the Army Commander, who was standing in front of a map on the wall. The Chairman of the Military Council was standing beside him marking in coloured pencil the positions of the troops for tomorrow's battle.

Though there was no one in the room but these two old comrades of his, the Army Artillery Commander approached with all military ceremony, drawing himself up to report the first stages of the execution of the order. The Army Commander lowered the candle and turned towards him. The Chairman of the Military Council moved away from the map and seated himself at the table.

"Twenty batteries will be moved before daybreak to the central sector," the Army Artillery Commander told him. "Seven batteries I left on the flanks, at Sarepta and Gumrak."

The Chairman of the Military Council, who was lighting his pipe, waved the smoke away from his face, and when he spoke his voice, though quiet, held a note of severity.

"What flanks? What have Sarepta and Gumrak got to do

with it? Nothing was said about flanks in the order—you have misunderstood the order.”

“By no means. I understood it perfectly.”

“It was written in the order,” (his lower lids quivered, and his eyes narrowed). “It was clearly written in the order: all artillery, all, to the last gun, to be concentrated on the central sector.”

The Army Artillery Commander glanced at the Army Commander, but in his eyes, too, he found only grave admonishment.

“Comrades!” said the Army Artillery Commander passionately. “Such an order means risking all—it means either life or death.”

“It does,” agreed the Chairman of the Military Council.

“It does,” echoed the Army Commander.

“What’s the good of gathering mighty forces at the central sector if we leave our flanks completely exposed? What guarantee is there that the enemy will try to break through precisely on the frontal sector? What if he gives battle at some other place? The infantry alone would be unable to beat him off, the infantry is worn out by today’s fighting. And it will be too late then to regroup the batteries. That’s what I’m afraid of.... The armoured trains can’t help us any more, the infantry will have to move away from the circuit railway during the night, anyhow.... That’s what I’m afraid of.”

“You mustn’t be afraid of anything!” The Chairman of the Military Council rapped on the table once and again. “You mustn’t be afraid! There must be no hesitation. D’you mean to say you don’t realize that the Whites are bound to throw all their forces tomorrow precisely on the central sector? The whole course of yesterday’s military operations makes this an inevitability. Take their grave reverses at Sarepta—they won’t want to attack there a second time, they know of the movement of Budyonny’s brigade to the rear of their fifth column. And then, there is their victory yesterday on the central sector, where they succeeded in driving a wedge into our front. Last but not least are the advantages of the Voroponovo-Sadovaya terrain—the gullies and a short cut to Tsaritsyn. You told me yourself that the Cossacks were being relieved by an officers’ brigade. You can draw your own conclusions from this. An officers’ brigade means twelve thou-

sand Volunteers, officers of the regular army, veteran fighters. Mamontov would not think of using a unit like that just for demonstration. . . . We have every reason to be assured that the attack will be made on the central sector."

"The evening reports corroborate this," said the Army Commander. "The Whites have withdrawn fourteen or fifteen regiments from the southern and western lines of advance and are moving them up across the steppe. And that's not counting the officers' brigade. . . ."

"In this way," said the Chairman of the Military Council, "the enemy is himself creating a situation which, if we are unswervingly bold and firm, will offer us his main forces for destruction. And it is our task tomorrow not merely to beat off attack, but to destroy the very core of the Don Army. . . ."

The Army Artillery Commander smiled broadly, and sat down, smiting his knee with his fist.

"Boldly conceived!" he said. "A bold plan! I haven't a word to say! I'll prepare him such a welcome, he'll run from here to the Don like a mad dog."

The Chairman of the Military Council moved the candle to the tactical map, and the Army Artillery Commander began explaining how he intended to place his batteries, close together, axles touching, and how many tiers there would be.

"Don't entrench," the Army Commander told him. "Post your guns on mounds in the open. We'll move the infantry right up to the batteries. Go and ring up the commanders."

A few minutes later a silent, hurried movement had begun all along the thirty-mile front. Over the dark plain, beneath a starry sky, in which the Milky Way twinkled as it only does on exceptionally fine autumn nights, horse teams harnessed to guns and howitzers galloped past, heavy guns were dragged more slowly by as many as sixteen horses, and carts, some four-wheeled, some two-wheeled, dashed by. The infantry units were unobtrusively moved from their positions and concentrated in the contracted semicircle of a defence area.

The reveille rang out over the plain, grey with hoarfrost, as the buglers roused the Cossack regiments to battle. The sun was beginning to rise over the edge of the Volga steppe.

Guns roared in the distance. Machine guns stuttered. The Red front was silent. It lay deep in shadow, the sun behind it. All batteries had been instructed to wait for the signal—four high bursts of shrapnel.

The White attack began right from the horizon with hurricane fire. All living creatures lay prone, huddled up, cowering—the smallest mound, the shallowest depression in the ground served for cover. The thunderous din was occasionally rent by a wild shriek, and every now and then a cart wheel or a smouldering greatcoat flew upwards, together with clods of earth torn out of the ground. The artillery preparation lasted forty-five minutes. When men dared to raise their heads the whole plain was alive with advancing troops. Lines of officers marched ahead several rows deep, their bayonets levelled, neither hurrying nor taking cover, and after them, spaced out as if on parade, came the twelve columns of the officers' battalions. Two regimental banners fluttered high above their heads. The drums beat insistently, the fifes wailed. And behind the infantry surged the dark masses of innumerable Cossack squadrons.

"Ivan Ilyich, there he is, the class foe! The fine warriors! Well-shod, well-dressed, fed on meat. . . ."

"What a pity to have to spoil such fine clothes!"

"Stop fooling, Comrades! You must be on the alert."

"We chatter to keep our spirits up, Comrade Telegin."

The enemy's leading lines quickened their steps, till they were now not more than three hundred yards away. . . . Their faces could be made out. And may never such faces be seen again! Sunken eyes, pale with hate, the skin drawn taut over the muscles, preparatory to jerking open the mouths for spasmodic "hurrahs". . . .

The Army Artillery Commander leaned well out of the hole in the brick wall of the water tower, and extended his arm backwards, so as to be ready to give the signal, "Four rounds of shrapnel" to the telephone operator. He waited a minute longer till the ranks and columns, swaying as they marched in measured tread to the sound of drum and fife, should have crossed the railway line. . . . One more minute. . . . So long as the devils don't break into a run! . . .

"Comrade Company Commander, I can't stand it any longer! I can't. . . ."

"Back to the trench, you bastard!"

"I'm going to vomit, just let me move away. . . ."

"I'll blow your brains out, bastard!"

"Don't, Comrade Ivan Gora. . . . Don't!"

"Pick up your rifle!"

The Army Artillery Commander said to himself: *when the first ones reach that post will be time enough. . . .* The leading unit was already curving in swaying lines, the men stumbling over the railway sleepers, and making their way as best they could. He screwed up his eyes to get a clearer view of the sagging post, from the top of which stuck out a fragment of barbed wire. . . . On this post depended the outcome of the whole attack, the issue of the battle, the fate of Tsaritsyn—damn it, of the Revolution itself! There, the one in the tan boots, he was the first to step out and pass the post. . . . The Army Artillery Commander unclenched his fist behind his back, stretching out the fingers, and still leaning out of the opening, barked out the word: "Signal!" to the telephone operator.

One after another, four fluffy clouds of shrapnel exploded in the clear sky, above the heads of the advancing columns. The air was shaken by the loudest and most thunderous blast ever heard. The brick water tower swayed. The operator let go of the receiver and clapped his hands to his ears. The Army Artillery Commander stamped about as if dancing, waving his arms like the conductor of an orchestra. . . .

The plain over which, only a moment before, the grey-green battalions had marched with such sinister and menacing rhythm, had become a gigantic smoking crater. Through the smoke and dust the oncoming lines could be seen dropping to the ground, as if thunderstruck, the lines behind them jostling in confusion. Armoured trains were already speeding towards the enemy's rear along an unoccupied sector of the track. The Red companies came out of the trenches, and rushed to the counterattack. The Army Artillery Commander snatched the receiver from the operator's hands: "Shift the fire in the rear!" And as soon as the tempest of fire had cut off the retreat of the Whites, lorries carrying machine guns dived into their ranks, and hell was let loose.

Dasha was sitting in the little yard, on a box labelled "Medical Supplies"; her hands, red from a recent scrubbing in cold water, lay on her knees, and she held up her face, the eyes closed, towards the October sun. Replete-looking sparrows were puffing out their feathers and preening themselves on the bare branches of the acacia bushes, just out of the shadow cast by the roof. They were boasting to one another of the plentiful oats and horse-droppings they had feasted upon in the street in front of the white one-storey house. Carts drove up and frightened them away, and they all flew on to a near-by birch tree. The chirping of the sparrows came to Dasha as infinitely soothing variations on the theme: *whatever happens, we mean to go on living.*

She wore a white, bloodstained hospital smock, and a triangular kerchief bound tightly round her brows, the tip hanging over the nape of her neck. There was no more rattling of window glass from the cannonade, and bombs were no longer dropping with hollow explosions from air-planes. The horrors of the last two days had dwindled down to the twittering of sparrows. When you came to think of it, there was something almost insulting in the contempt for man displayed by these little winged creatures with their full crops. *Cheep-cheep!* they twittered, *the sparrow may be small, but he is wise. He pecks at the dung, he hops from branch to branch over the hen sparrow's head, he chirps farewell to the setting sun, and sleeps till daylight—and therein lies the whole wisdom of life.*

Dasha could hear the carts stopping at the gate. . . . Fresh consignments of wounded were being brought to the house, and carried in. The light shone pink through her eyelids, but she was too tired even to try to open her eyes. The doctor would send for her when necessary. . . . He was very kind, the doctor, and though his voice was gruff, his glance was benevolent. "Out with you to the yard this minute, Darya Dmitrevna," he had scolded. "You're in an awful state! Go and sit down somewhere. I'll wake you when I need you." What a lot of marvellous people there were in the world after all! Dasha thought how nice it would be if he came out for a smoke, so that she could confide her meditations on the sparrows to him—she flattered herself that they were rather

profound. What if he *did* find her attractive—was there any harm in that? Dasha sighed, once and again, the second time heavily. Anything, however intolerable, became bearable when one met a kindly glance, however fleeting. For then all one's spiritual forces, one's faith in oneself, came to life. . . . And one lived again. That's something you sparrows can't understand. . . .

But instead of the doctor, an individual with a nervous sallow countenance and tragic eyes emerged from the basement, where the kitchen was. He wore the official uniform of the Educational Department, but it was no longer belted with rope. Mounting halfway up the brick steps, he craned his thin neck and listened. The only sound was the chirping of the sparrows.

"Awful!" he said. "A nightmare! A delirium!"

He clapped his hands to his ears and immediately took them away. The low, slanting rays of the sun fell on his thin, bony nose and childish mouth.

"Dear God, is there no end to it? Have you ever had sound-hallucinations?" he asked, abruptly addressing Dasha. "Excuse me, we haven't been introduced, but I know you. . . . I met you before the war in Petersburg, at the 'Philosophical Evenings.' You were younger then, but you're better-looking now, more interesting. Sound hallucinations begin with a distant avalanche, noiseless at first, but coming near with terrifying rapidity. Then comes a kind of discordant hum, like nothing on earth, which gets louder and louder till your whole brain and ears seem to be filled with it. You know perfectly well that there's nothing there really, but the sound is within yourself. . . . You feel as if you simply couldn't stand any more of these trumpets of Jericho. . . . and then you lose consciousness, and that saves you. . . . I ask you—when is it all going to end?"

He stood in front of Dasha with his back to the sun, pulling at his thin fingers and cracking the joints.

"I've got to get hold of some clay and knead it up to mend my stove—we've been banished to the basement as non-working elements. . . . My father was principal of the high school all his life, and built this house out of his savings. . . . But try and explain that to them! The basement is full of scorched bricks, and the windows look out on the pavement, and they're so dusty they don't admit any light.

My books are all tumbled in a corner. My mother has heart disease, she's fifty-five, and my sister lost the use of her legs from malaria. And the winter's coming on . . . dear God!"

Dasha could not help wondering if he was going to start breaking off his fingers one after another, like the Spirit of Sugar in *The Blue Bird* at the Art Theatre.

"He who does not work, neither shall he eat. . . . After graduating from the historico-philological faculty, and almost completing a doctor's dissertation . . . teaching three years in the girl's high school of this city of doom, this godforsaken hole, where I am bound hand and foot by the illness of my mother and sister . . . to come to this—he who does not work, neither shall he eat! They shoved a spade into my hand and sent me by force to dig trenches, and told me to bow to the revolution. . . . To the violation of liberty! To the triumph of the horny hand! To the desecration of science! And if I refuse? I am neither from the nobility, nor the bourgeoisie, and I am certainly not a member of the Black Hundred. I bear the scar from a stone thrown at me during a students' demonstration. But I have no desire to bow down before a revolution which banishes me to the basement. . . . I didn't cultivate my brains just to look through a dusty window at the feet of my conquerors tramping over the pavement. And I have no right to bring my life to a violent end—I have a mother and a sister. Even in my dreams I have nowhere to go, nowhere to hide. . . . 'Let us bear away the sacred flame!' But where to? There are no lonely caverns left on the earth. . . ."

He said all this with extraordinary rapidity, his eyes roving from side to side. Dasha heard him out feeling neither surprise nor sympathy, just as if this highly nervous individual who had suddenly emerged from the basement kitchen were the inevitable finishing touch to the horrors of the last few days—the din, the fires, the groans of the wounded.

"What made *you* join them?" he asked, suddenly reverting to an ordinary petulant tone. "Mere thoughtlessness? Or was it fear or hunger? I may as well tell you I have been watching you for the last two days, remembering how I used to admire you in silence at the 'Philosophical Evenings' in Petersburg, not daring to approach you, or try and make your acquaintance. . . . You were almost Blok's 'Unknown

Lady'...."* ("Why *almost?*" wondered Dasha). "A princess, who ought to be sitting embroidering gilt screens, lifting the wounded, in a soiled smock, her hands red and rough.... It's awful, awful! There's the true visage of revolution for you!"

In a sudden access of rage, Dasha went into the house, her lips compressed without a word of reply to the pale and sallow neurotic. Coming straight in from the fresh air, she was almost overpowered by the sickly smell of iodoform and suffering humanity. In every room there were wounded men lying on cots of unplanned planks crowded closely together.

She found the doctor in the operating room where, till he was turned out, the teacher in the girls' high school had sat writing his thesis. The doctor was drying his hairy arms, bared almost to the shoulder, and when he caught sight of Dasha he winked a brown eye at her.

"Well, did you get a nap? I've just had a very interesting operation—cut about 4 metres off a lad's small intestines.... I'll be drinking vodka with him in a month's time. And a commander's just been brought in suffering from acute shock.... I gave him some camphor shots—the heart's on the job, but he hasn't come round yet.... Watch the pulse, if it shows signs of weakening, give him another shot...."

Flinging the towel over his shoulder, he led Dasha up to a cot. On it, flat on his back, lay Ivan Ilyich Telegin. His eyes were tightly closed, as if against a blinding light. The drawn lips were firmly compressed. The doctor picked up the unconscious man's left hand, which was lying on his breast. He felt the pulse and shook the wrist gently.

"See how relaxed it is—just now it was completely rigid.... Shock sometimes shows itself in the queerest ways, I would have you know.... Very little is known about it.... The principle is almost the same as that underlying infantile convulsions.... the inability of the central nervous system to stand up against sudden pressure...."

The doctor stopped in the middle of a sentence, just then himself experiencing a mild form of shock.... Darya Dmitrevna had sunk gently on to her knees at the bedside and was pressing her face against the unconscious hand which the doctor had relinquished.

* Blok's "*Unknown Lady*"—a symbolic poem by A. A. Blok (1880-1921).

Vadim Petrovich Roshchin woke up late one morning in a comfortless hotel bedroom. The unwashed window was hung with yellowing sheets of newspaper, the bed was too short, the blankets threadbare. His train would only leave late at night, and a long, empty day spread itself before him. There was only one cigarette left in the box. Squeezing the end of it between his finger and thumb, he lit up and fell to staring at his lean, sinewy hand and the goose flesh on his arm. The search for Katya had been in vain. . . . His leave was over, and he had to return to his regiment, in the Kuban. In two days he would be getting out of the train, climbing into a *britchka*, and driving over the steppe, without speaking a word to the private on the box. The wheels of the *britchka* would sink into the ruts of the wide village street—ruts filled with the useless rain water of November. He would alight right into mud, tell the driver to take his things into the hut, and stride up to headquarters, in the former village council, to Major General Shvede, the regimental commander.

He would find that well-groomed fool reading the works of the Symbolists—Sologub's *Flaming Circle*, or Gumilev's *Pearls*. After reporting, Vadim Petrovich would take over a platoon. He might get a company. The same old round would begin again: drill, officers' assemblies, where they would ask him about women and drinking bouts, chaff him about his thinness, his grey hair, his gloomy looks. The evenings would be spent in pacing up and down the hut. At ten o'clock his orderly would silently pull off his boots. . . . That was one possibility—the other was the finding of the regiment at the front, in battle. . . .

He conjured up a vision of the lifeless steppe, beneath piled-up banks of northern clouds, kitchen chimneys protruding from the ashes of burned homes, carts of wounded stuck fast in the mud, dead horses, and—final epitome of this steppe—trenches filled with men lying about amidst excrements and bloodstained rags. . . . He tried to imagine himself in the part of blusterer, a romantic fatalist setting an example of an icy hatred which he had long ceased to feel. All he now felt was disgust and nausea at the very thought of human beings.

Sitting up in bed and fumbling at the buttons of his shirt, he reached out his hand to pick up his trousers, which had fallen on the floor, in the hope of finding tobacco in the pockets, but fell back on the pillow instead, and clasped his hands behind his head.

"I can't go on like this," he said softly, hating the unnatural sound of his voice. The way he said it made him feel sick. . . . "Why 'can't' I? What does 'can't' mean? There's nothing one can't do! For that matter, one can fasten one end of one's leather belt to the door handle, and the other round one's neck. . . . Come on, now, Roshchin, be honest! Why all these airs and graces? You're just a beast like all the rest."

And he began, with vengeful fury, to go over in his mind the innumerable encounters he had had here, in Ekaterino-slav. . . . Women, bearing the traces of continual evacuation on their countenances, still clinging to the pitiful remnants of their dignity, wandering from one hotel to another, offering for sale all sorts of trifles "hallowed by their associations"; generals who were on hail-fellow-well-met, back-slapping terms with blue-jowled individuals, bursting with health, loud-mouthed experts in the purchase and sale of bills of lading for government property; then there were the noisy country gentlemen, frightened away from their estates, crowded into hotel bedrooms with their bewildered wives and lanky, freckled, disappointed daughters, continually borrowing small sums of money and dining sumptuously in the hotel restaurant, where they instructed the cook in the preparation of outlandish dishes, dubbed the revolution "this mess," and did their best to while away the time amidst the roseate hopes which never deserted the Russian gentry even when things were at their worst. He remembered the motley crew he had seen in the vestibule of the hotel—people who were rapidly losing their social status, and could only be identified by crested buttons or peaked caps, which showed that the individual endeavouring to force a watch, in obvious disrepair, upon the insolent youth who looked like a lucky profiteer, must have been a public prosecutor, and that the grey-haired, asthmatic gentleman, leaning on a stick, was a whilom director of the Department of Finance, who having already parted with his valuables, could now only watch with envious eyes the fingers which handled the rustling banknotes so deftly in many a tempting deal. Nimble profiteers,

faultlessly attired, with gesticulating fingers and restlessly darting eyes, flew in and out of the main doors, drew together in anxiously whispering groups, and rushed out of doors again, like so many winged Mercuries, gods of commerce and luck. In the vestibule one could follow the movements of government supplies, or of some lost tank of machine oil, trace the course of the dollar, the exchange value of which rose and fell several times a day, depending on whether there had been a French or a German counterattack on the western front.... But this was high finance, and the petty speculators in the vestibule would make way, their eyes popping with excitement as they fixed them on some financial bigwig.

Such a one would enter the vestibule in a very long coat, wearing a peaked cap, or trilby hat, pushed well back, and carrying an umbrella, his glossy beard falling over his shirt front. This beard is sacred—its owner only allows himself to single out one hair, and twist it as an aid to the mental processes in moments of the utmost concentration. In his eyes may be read an intense spiritual life, utterly divorced from trifles, for this is a thinker, ever seeking, finding, and classifying the elements ruling the fluctuations in the quintessence of world energy—stable currency.

An intricate game is played here in the vestibule and in the streets surrounding the hotel. This game is prohibited by the official hetman authorities and the German occupation command. The players are in perpetual movement on the strip of pavement from the entrance of the hotel to the nearest corner. They buy and sell by means of fixed stares and fluttering fingers, with an occasional word thrown in. None of them have any currency, for that is safely hidden away somewhere, and nobody knows how much there is in the town, anyhow. The stakes in this game are the differences in the rate of exchange, and accounts are settled in hetman banknotes. Fortunes are made in a few minutes, in a few minutes the rich man becomes a beggar. The lucky one retires with his hangers-on to a café, to feast upon cakes and acorn coffee, and the loser roams the boulevard disconsolately, the November wind, which drives scraps of paper and fallen leaves before it, lifting the skirts of his long coat.

The people living in this hotel, crowding the pavements, the tobacco shops, the cafés, the Georgian eating houses,

trading with one another, swindling one another, belonged to the noisy, greedy herds, bleating and lowing in all the towns wrested from the revolution, where they could eat, drink, copulate, cheat and indulge in speculation, at their own sweet will. It was for the protection of these herds that bayonets and guns were required, and new towns had to be constantly taken from the enemy, it was for them that Russia, great, united, indivisible, had to be cleansed of the Bolshevik pest. . . .

"It's all bunk and lies!" said Vadim Petrovich aloud. "Supposing I were to desert!"

And he began turning over the idea in his mind, for the first time in his life shaking off the bonds of moral restraint. He experienced a diabolical satisfaction in discovering in himself hitherto unplumbed depths of baseness. He actually laughed—through clenched teeth. These thoughts had the force of instantaneous revelation, of the initial surrender to temptation.

"What are these sanctities for which you have ridden through life, without once slackening the reins? You considered yourself a decent fellow, you belonged to decent society, you even left the regiment to go to the university, in order to widen your intellectual horizon. . . . In your youth you imagined you were like Andrei Bolkonsky in *War and Peace*. The moral impulse gave you satisfaction, and this was quite enough for you; you felt you were pure. You turned away in disgust from everything doubtful or unclean as from a sewer. You only had three affairs with married women altogether, and you broke off with these females just when relations were at their most exalted and refined, just when tremulous curiosity was beginning to give way to the routine of sensual embraces. . . . And now for the reckoning! Where has this blameless life, this lofty bearing, landed you? In the charred remains after a conflagration, the burned-out shell of a man. . . !"

Having thus squared his accounts, Vadim Petrovich began a thorough examination of the various ways in which he might desert. Escape abroad? But the whole world was in the throes of war. Everywhere there were detectives on the watch for suspicious-looking foreigners, everywhere they were being hauled off to prison, there to be hanged. . . . All over the world gallant lads were being packed into ships.

"We'll polish off the German swine in no time," carolled the jolly lads, "and come back to our girls!" Then they are torpedoed in mid-ocean, and the gallant lads struggle in the icy water around a patch of oil. In Europe, endless columns of young men, in khaki suits, baggy as shrouds, were marching in serried ranks, in hopeless despair, in utter docility, to meet machine guns, trench mortars, mine throwers, flame throwers—fire ahead of them, fire behind them. No—the idea of going abroad must be counted out. One might make one's way to Odessa, get a forged passport and a job as a waiter in an eating house. . . . But people would be sure to come up to him with exclamations of surprise: "Is it really you, Roshchin? Too bad, old man!" Speculate on a small scale? Do a little stealing? That required quite a lot of vitality. Try living on women? A bit too old for that! "Well, then—say one manages to keep alive till the final victory . . . all the socialists are hung, the muzhiks thoroughly whipped, the English have forgiven us, and we start again, with somewhat hangdog looks, recruiting an army on the other side of the Volga, to beat the Germans. Arms are issued, and one fine day the soldiers turn on the officers, the heroes of the Frost Campaign, and the whole thing begins all over again. And my poor Katya, still not found, calls for the last time from some station with broken windows, amidst crowds of the sleeping, the delirious, and the dead: 'Vadim! Vadim!' And this brings us to the last possibility—to hang oneself without a moment's delay. . . . Afraid? Not a bit of it! But there's something humiliating in having to make the effort. . . ."

His hands were like ice, he could feel their coldness against the nape of his neck. He could not come to any decision whatever. Tiny beings seemed to be running up and down his body like flies, stealing away his will, his very soul. . . . When it got dark he would get up, he told himself, put on his trousers, go on foot to the station, and perhaps, even buy cigarettes on the way. . . . He would live—the sword does not cut down such a one, nor does the bullet strike him. Even the typhus louse will not bite him. . . .

The sound of two angry male voices in rapid altercation had long been coming through a door in the wall, which was barricaded by a chest of drawers. One of them was

continually exclaiming: "Listen to me, Mr. Paprikaki, if I were God. . .", but the other never let him go on, interrupting him with the words: "Listen to me, Gabel, you're not God, you're an idiot! One must be a madman to buy Krupp Stahlwerke shares an hour before the papers come out. . . ." "But listen—I didn't say I was God!" "Listen, Gabel, you couldn't cover my losses with all you have plus your liver and lights, you're a stiff. . . ."

These snatches of conversation forced themselves upon Vadim Petrovich's attention. "Damn it!" he thought, "I wish I could shoot through the door." But suddenly there came the sound of running and of agitated voices at the door leading into the corridor: "A doctor—quick!" "What's the good of a doctor? He's almost cold!" "What's the matter? How did it happen?" "Never you mind how it happened, it's none of your business!"

The sound of voices subsided, to be followed by the clanking of spurs.

"Excuse me, Mr. Inspector, is it true he was the nephew of the Emperor of Austria?"

"Quite true! It's all true! Now gentlemen, clear the corridor, please!"

And then, right at the door, a dialogue in undertones:

"It was no suicide. His own aide shot him—he was a Bolshevik."

"What d'you mean? An Austrian officer a Bolshevik?"

"Why not? They're everywhere. . . . Not only Vienna—Berlin itself has been in their hands since yesterday. . . ."

"Oh, my God! I can't take it in!"

"Yes—there's nothing for it but flight."

"Where is there to go?"

"God knows—some island or other. . . ."

"That's right! . . . I heard somebody say yesterday that there were islands in Dutch Indonesia with breadfruit trees growing on them. And no clothes whatever are needed. But how is one to get there?"

A minute later, the hotel bootboy, with his snub nose and his mouth stretched from ear to ear in a permanent grin, burst into the room without knocking.

"Extra! Revolution in Germany! Three rubles, please, Gent!"

He flung the newspaper on to Roshchin's chest, observing neither the "Gent's" blazing eyes nor his deathly pallor. "I'll take the money from the window sill. Read the paper, Gent!"

He ran out of the room. Vadim Petrovich's heart beat wildly, but the closely printed sheet of newspaper lay long unfolded on his chest... Revolution in Germany! Soldiers on the tops of railway carriages, smashed railway stations, wildly singing crowds, orators holding forth from the steps of monuments, sawing the air with their arms and shouting: "Liberty! Liberty!" As if liberty would take the place of bread, one's native land, a sense of duty, and the measured pace of life under a state it had taken centuries to build up! Revolution—and the unswept streets, unkempt girls in the parks... and dreariness unutterable for the man looking out of the window at the weather-beaten roofs of a town in which there was no mystery left.... The very sun had risen to inaccessible heights, where the eye could not follow it.... The dreariness of a man trying so hard to carry his personality, his independence, his pride, his grief, intact through life....

Vadim Petrovich suddenly realized that he was talking to himself. This was too much like open-eyed delirium. He unfolded the sheet of newspaper. The news of the beginning of revolution in Germany was splashed in big type right across the page. It began with the armistice negotiations in the forest of Compiègne: German delegates had presented themselves at General Weygand's train in an artillery siding, and asked to be informed of the French proposals.

But the General, neither inviting them to be seated, nor offering his hand in greeting, had replied with cold fury: "I have no proposals.... Germany must be forced to her knees."

That very day the leaders who had brought Germany to such humiliation were overthrown. A Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was formed in Berlin. The Kaiser secretly abandoned his headquarters at Spa and fled to Holland, surrendering his sword at the frontier to a lieutenant in the Netherlands army.

A few minutes later, Vadim Petrovich, fully dressed, his greatcoat tightly belted, his cap on his head, stood at the window and read the paper through again. Then he thrust a bundle of crumpled paper money into his coat pocket, and went out of the hotel.

A stout man who looked as if he had just wriggled out of a diving suit from the bottom of the ocean, passed by the hotel at that moment. His crimson face was bloated, the eyeballs starting from their orbits. His thick, parched lips opened and shut as he repeated over and over again: "I sell Krupp's Stahlwerke, Krupp's Stahlwerke..." His eyes roved over the passers-by, in the frantic hope of finding a still greater fool than himself. . . .

He was jostled and pushed to the wall by Austrian soldiers, who passed by in groups, their rifles slung over their shoulders, the muzzles pointing downwards. . . This was one of the symbols of revolution—immediately, from the very first day, to renounce the slaughtering of one's fellow man. . . . Walking beside them on the pavement strutted a slender officer with a silky, youthful moustache; his delicate features bore an expression of agonizing strain, as he walked along, head held proudly aloft, a red ribbon thrust into his left shoulder strap. This boy, who had got into the army in wartime, had probably had no opportunity of showing off his brand-new uniform and rattling the metal scabbard of his sword in the gay streets of Vienna, where the women are so delightfully frivolous. It had fallen to his lot, thanks to his youth and good humour, to be elected to a Soldiers' Committee, and now he was leading his company to the station, evacuating the town, beneath a raking fire of spiteful, mocking glances. . . . And in Vienna now there would be chaos, hunger, workers building street barricades. . . .

Roshchin followed these haughty Europeans with his eyes for a long time. He, too, felt a spiteful pleasure in the sight. "You didn't stay long in the Ukraine, guzzling goose and bacon. . . . Brest-Litovsk wasn't so wonderful, after all!" But he suddenly stopped short, scowling: "What's it to you, anyhow? They'll hug themselves in Moscow, of course. But you'll have to go to your stinking trenches, to your counter-revolutionaries. . . ." And he scowled still more fiercely at the realization that he had at last uttered this word, and with such cynical calmness. . . . For it was in this word that lay the cause of his emotional conflicts. Katya had shown greater insight than he possessed, when she had said to him, at the time of their violent quarrel in Rostov: "If you believe with your whole heart in the justice of your cause, then go ahead and kill." According to the traditional ideas of all honest

and self-respecting intellectuals, the word counterrevolutionary was equivalent to blackguard and traitor. . . . How was one to live with the thought of this?

Thrusting his hands into the pockets of his greatcoat, he sauntered down the imposing Ekaterininski Boulevard. It seemed to him that he even walked like a blackguard, with a shuffling, shambling gait. Passing a barber's shop, he glanced involuntarily at himself in the narrow mirror on one side of the door, and his reflected face, deathly pale, returned him a bitter, rueful smile. He went in and seated himself in the chair without even taking off his greatcoat. "A shave!" Here, too, everything inspired him with repugnance—the room, low-ceilinged and muggy, the cheap, bulging wallpaper, the barber himself, with a comb stuck in his scurfy hair, his soft, grimy hands, which reeked of some disgustingly sweet scent. . . .

In no hurry to begin on his customer's cheeks, the barber made conversation as he lathered up the soap:

"As if things were no bad enough before. . . . They've been fighting four years, and now they must have a revolution. . . . What were they thinking about? Why didn't they ask me?" He opened his razor and began stropping it fiercely. "There's high politics and there's our quiet little business, and may you grow fat on the difference between them!" He began applying the warm lather to Vadim Petrovich's cheeks. "You're the first customer I've had today. People are going out of their minds. The Kaiser Wilhelm escapes to Holland, and so nobody in our town wants a shave! And I'll tell you why. They're all afraid of the Bolsheviks, they're afraid of Makhno, they want to go about with stubbly chins so as to look like proletarians." Here he drew the blade down Roshchin's cheek with a hissing sound. "Excuse me, do you object to having the tip of your nose held? Some people ask for it. I learned my trade in Kursk, our master was oldfashioned—he used to stick his finger into a customer's mouth, but he used a cucumber for the gentry. Ten kopeks with the finger, twelve with a cucumber—it was a fair price for those days. I'll go over your cheeks again, there's plenty of time. There was a madman in here just before you came in. Paprikaki—d'you know him? One of our biggest financiers. His nerves are all on edge, it's impossible to shave him, he has a rash on his cheeks, it hurts him even to touch it with a shaving

brush. Today it's come out all over his body, thank God! He thought to cheer me up by telling me the Germans were on the point of evacuating the Ukraine, the Bolsheviks have begun an offensive at Belgorod, and a new Ukrainian government has been declared at Belaya Tserkov—a Directorate. We've had a Rada, we've had Soviets, we've had a Hetman, but we never had a Directorate before. Petlura and Vinnichenko are at the head of it. They were both customers of mine in Kiev, in the year 1916. Petlura was a bookkeeper, he worked in the zemstvo union, and Vinnichenko was a writer—we used to go to see his plays. They weren't anything special—this woman is unfaithful to this artist, you know, and they have high words, and then her lover comes to her, and my lady lies down with him. And the artist—fancy!—doesn't like to go into the room, and turn them out, and doesn't want to leave the jade, so he starts biting his own wrist, so as to bite through the tendons and make himself an invalid for life, just to spite her. I used to shave Vinnichenko, he had a flabby skin, with enlarged pores. Paprikaki says the Directorate has issued an appeal to the peasants to overthrow Hetman Skoropadsky.... The hetman certainly has troubles enough of his own!"

Having gone over Vadim Petrovich's cheeks a second time, the barber squinted disapprovingly at his untrimmed, greying hair. "Allow me to cut your hair *à la boxe*—I still have a little foreign hair dye left—Raven's Wing—if you like I could.... What's the good of a grey mop?" ("Shave it all off," said Roshchin through clenched teeth.) "Certainly, Sir!" and he began opening and shutting the scissors beside his ear, as if to gather momentum. "You know what, Captain—I have only one dream: to find some little town, never mind how remote, where the streets are lighted with oil lamps. It doesn't need much to make a man happy... about a dozen customers. After work, to light a pipe and sit in the doorway. All around would be peace and quiet, with harmless old folk passing backwards and forwards. I'd get up and bow to them, and they would bow to me. Nobody thinks of us little men, nowadays, we don't count. But if it weren't for us—your grey mop would grow and grow. Look at yourself, and think what you were like when you came in, and what a picture I've made of you!"

Roshchin glanced at himself in the mirror. His gleaming

skull was distinguished in shape, with plenty of room for noble and lofty thoughts. The face was narrow, tapering down with a delicate transition from the ever so slightly prominent cheekbones to the chin, which, while it may not have been very pronounced was by no means weak. The dark brows, contracted over the bridge of the nose, turned up whimsically towards the temples, counteracting the severity of the rather small but intelligent eyes, which, on account of the dilated pupils, looked almost black. Nothing for a man to be ashamed of in the face like that! The mouth, now, the mouth spoilt everything. The eyes can lie, they can be false and secretive, but the mouth is hard to change. . . . Look at it—perpetually moving, no form whatever, like a slug. . . . Disgusting! You're no Faust, Vadim Petrovich. . . .

Rising, he put his soiled, bullet-riddled field cap on his head at a smart angle, paid the barber generously, and went out of the shop. . . . He had still come to no decision. . . . but he no longer felt the flabbiness in his legs, no longer stubbed the toes of his boots against the cobblestones. Look what going to the barber can do for a man! A drop of self-esteem had filtered down into the murky depths of his despairing soul.

Lights were beginning to show in windows. The wind was moaning through the bare poplars, the tops of which had become a part of the darkness. Between the trunks of those on the other side of the street, a bright light boldly shed its rays on the crudely painted door of the "Bi-Ba-Bo" cabaret, famed for its mutton grilled in the Georgian manner. At the thought of food Vadim Petrovich felt a pang in his stomach—he had had nothing to eat since the day before. The sensation of hunger was powerful, virile, rising up in him and pushing into the background all psychological subtleties. He turned resolutely in the direction of the brightly lit-up door. As he was about to enter, a nondescript being in a white skirt moved away from a tree and tried to bar his way, and a voice hissed after him imploringly: "I could show you a good time, Officer!"

The "Bi-Ba-Bo" was a long, low room freshly decorated by the famous "Left" artist, Valet, who had fled from Petrograd. The low ceiling was black, studded with silver-paper

stars. Yellow, orange, and brick-coloured wraiths, their limbs sprawling wildly—rectangular travesties of men and women—seemed to be rushing over the black walls as if caught up in a hurricane. These mural decorations were much too serious for a cabaret—it was not sensuality but horror which was driving this naked herd across the walls. The capitalist who had invested money in the enterprise—Paprikaki again!—had been heard to say: "I'm damned if I understand these daubs, they make me sick, but the public likes them...."

Roshchin sat over his wine after dinner. His train was leaving at 4 a. m., and he decided to stay in the cabaret till three, and then see how he felt about things.... He was nice and warm, and there was a slight buzzing going on in his head.

The waiter, a Tatar from that irretrievably lost paradise, the Yar Restaurant in Moscow, kept coming up to his table, taking bottles out of the champagne bucket, and saying, as he bent over to pour out the wine:

"Excuse me coming to you so often, Vadim Petrovich.... Remember Moscow? Ah! You see the way we live here. I can't get these cads out of my head, sleeping or waking...."

Despite the atmosphere of anxiety prevailing in the town, where, in the darkness of remote side streets there rang out occasional shots, which the hetman's mounted police, riding towards the governor's palace, tried not to hear, and despite today's black-market panic, the restaurant was full. The entertainment had not yet begun. A lanky youth with a craning neck, no thicker than a man's wrist, and fuzzy hair cascading towards the back of his neck, was seated at the piano on a tiny stage, playing a potpourri of airs from musical comedies.

All around Roshchin's table were noise and drunken revelry. Some of the country gentlemen, no longer able to stand the tedium of their hotel bedrooms, in the society of their disappointed daughters, were driving away care beside carafes of vodka....

"I assure you!" declared a gentleman with a peach-bloom complexion, "the Germans are *kaput* now! By the New Year there'll be a British Expeditionary Force in Moscow. We'll all be drinking Scotch. Every cloud has a silver lining." The worthy soul laughed, showing a row of perfect teeth. "So three cheers for the German revolution, after all!"

Another, cadaverously elegant, his eyes twinkling mockingly from the depths of their ashy sockets, raised his hand to gain attention: "The Lord Chancellor, as is well known, sits on the woolsack in the House of Lords. . . . But the Simbirsk nobility boasted that there was a marble pillar in the yard in front of their assembly, to show that nothing could ever shake the pillars of the nobility to the end of time . . . and so they nodded comfortably in the shade of the burdocks. . . . And now the day of the Russian nobility is over—and all because we had no woolsack. Just as the day of Mother Russia is over, gentlemen . . . the last page of the *Tale of the City of Glupov* has been turned, and the book flung into a corner. And all this happened on a weekday and not, as a certain wise man prophesied, amidst thunder and tempest—God simply spat and blew out the candle. . . . I sold my little bit of land back in 1914, and ever since I've been a citizen of the world. . . . It's the safest way. . . ."

"It's all very well for you, old man, you've been to Oxford—but what am I and my three daughters to do? Where are we to go?"

The red-cheeked gentleman gave a loud sniff and reached for the carafe. "And I don't agree about Russia being over and done with, either—all that's only your English education disagreeing with you. I'd take a job as bailiff or foreman, I'd plough three acres of land—sooner than give up my faith in Russia!"

He poured himself out a glass of vodka, and turned ponderously towards his neighbour at the table: "What am I to do with them? Tall as lampposts, flat as boards, freckled, sentimental—straight out of a Turgenev novel, and in times like these! It's all their mother's fault, but I'm partly to blame, too, I admit. The eldest wanted to go to Higher Educational Classes for Women but we dissuaded her, and she was lazy, anyhow. . . . The youngest was stage-struck, and she would have made a first-rate actress, I don't mind telling you. . . . We were fools enough to dissuade her, too—we even used threats. . . . In fact I played the heavy father—in times like these! And all because of our improvidence! It's true the English look three years ahead from their woolsack. . . . And we only see from one season to another." Tossing off the glass, his dewlaps quivering, he added unexpectedly: "But we'll pull through—we'll be all right."

The third man at the table was so drunk that he could do nothing but grind his teeth and chew flowers—small asters, the heads of which he broke off from a vase in the middle of the table. He heard nothing of the talk going on around him, and never took his dull eyes from the next table, where a pretty girl with an innocent-looking knot of ash-blond hair, sat opposite a tall young man in undress uniform. The young man, his cheek supported on the palm of his hand, taking no more notice of those around than if they had been a company of spectres, was weeping silently. The girl, her round, blue-eyed face puckered up in concern, was stroking his hand, every now and then picking it up and kissing it; leaning over him she said something in a rapid, nervous whisper. He shook his heavy head slowly. Roshchin could hear him answer in dull, lifeless tones, like a man muttering in his sleep:

"Leave me alone, Zena, leave me alone! I don't want anything any more—I don't want anybody, neither you nor myself."

He need not have gone on speaking—it was perfectly obvious anyhow, how this night would end for the young man. . . . There was something about the girl which reminded him of Katya—not her face, but her gentle, tender movements. . . . She, too, would probably end her days amidst people dying of typhus fever at some railway junction. . . . A pair of callow youths came in and sat down hurriedly at an empty table, concealing the couple from view. Both wore their hair in a straight fringe over their foreheads, had rotting teeth and wore diamond rings on their dirty fingers. . . . "First I knocked Marusya down with an iron rod," one of them boasted to the other, "and then I trampled on her till her bones cracked, the bitch. . . ."

"May I sit down at your table, Captain?"

Roshchin bowed his head silently. A man in steel-rimmed glasses seated himself, tucking his clumsy feet under his chair. He wore the greenish-grey, tight-fitting uniform of the German Landsturm. He said to the waiter in hesitant Russian:

"Please give me something to eat, I haven't eaten for a long time, and beer, beer!"

He inflated his lean cheeks to show how he would drink the beer, laughed, shot a glance of astonishment from blue eyes, imperturbable as a bird's, at the morose Roshchin.

"Does the Herr Captain speak German?"

"Yes."

"If I am in your way I will gladly look for another table."

"You're not in my way."

This time Roshchin's reply was not so harsh. The Landsturm trooper had one of those narrow German faces, with a small, sunken mouth, which retain their childish expression and delicate flush well into old age. His nose turned up slightly, as if from a benevolent curiosity towards all men.

"We soldiers weren't allowed to go to restaurants," he said. "But since yesterday German discipline has become much more reasonable."

Roshchin gave a wry smile. The German hastened to expound his idea more fully, emphasizing his words with a tough-nailed dogmatic forefinger:

"Discipline should be rational, only then does it become a form of social order, and an indispensable factor of progress. Reasonable discipline of this description is born of profound social movement. If it is not, if it is merely an instrument of compulsion, it cannot be called discipline...."

He nodded cheerfully as he wound up the expression of his somewhat vague ideas.

"Are you evacuating to Germany?" asked Roshchin.

"Yes. Our unit has elected a Committee, and it passed a resolution, which I am glad to say is perfectly compatible with principle—though this was not done without a struggle."

"Well—don't let us keep you, as they say in Russian."

"I've learned a bit of Russian, and I know that means 'get the hell out of here!'..."

"Something of the sort.... You seem to be a clever chap, why should we pretend? We met as foes, and as foes we part...."

"Ah, well," said the Landsturm trooper, shaking his head thoughtfully, "it would be no use my denying it—tactless even."

And he dismissed this subject with another smile of his thin lips. Food and beer were placed before him. Apologizing for being unable to take part in conversation for a short while, he started on his *shashlyk* in a leisurely manner, masticating almost reverentially each scrap of meat, and mouthful of white bread and grilled tomatoes.

"That was good," he said, slightly embarrassed by the fixed stare of Roshchin's dark, angry eyes. He ate up everything to the last morsel, wiped the plate clean with a crust, and popped the crust into his mouth. Then, with half-closed eyes, he slowly imbibed a glass of cold beer.

"We Germans take our food seriously. Germans have known what it is to starve, and will have to starve some more before the problem of food is finally solved."

Once again the long forefinger flew up.

"In the dawn of history, when humanity was passing from its primitive state of gathering the gifts of nature to that of the forcible wresting of those gifts from nature, food was the outcome of the arduous and dangerous process of obtaining it. And eating became a sacred rite. To eat meant to have possessed oneself of another's life, another's strength. Hence arose the conception of laying spells on nature by invocation, that is to say—magic. The magical ritual of eating underlies all mystical cults. The body of God is eaten. I have notes of an interesting talk with a Russian scholar on the origin of pancakes. Shrovetide is the festival of the eating of the sun. Spells were laid on it by ceremonial dances, and it was then eaten in effigy, in the form of pancakes. As you see, the Slavs have always aimed very high in their metaphysics." Laughing, he undid one of the metal buttons on his tunic, and pulled out a fat notebook with a rubbed leather binding, the one he had brought out in the railway carriage, two months before, to read a passage from Ammianus Marcellinus to Katya Roshchin. He placed it before him on the table and began carefully turning over the pages, which were closely covered with notes, quotations, addresses. . . .

"There," he said, placing his finger on a page. But it was not the quotation which arrested Roshchin's gaze: his attention was transfixed by an inscription just above it, in Katya's writing: "Ekaterina Dmitrevna Roshchin, Ekaterinoslav, Poste Restante."

"Where did you get that from?" he asked hoarsely.

The blood rushed to his face and he fumbled at the collar of his tunic. It seemed to the German that the Russian officer's other hand was just going to pull out a revolver—the times were violent. . . . But the wild eyes of the officer expressed nothing but suffering and entreaty. . . . The Landsturm trooper said in his gentlest tones:

"I see you know this lady, I can tell you something about her."

"I know her. . . ."

"It's a sad story I'm afraid. . . ."

"Sad? Why? Is the lady dead?"

"I can't say anything for certain. I should like to hope for the best. . . . The war has made me realize that human beings have extraordinary powers of survival, despite the fact that they are so easily hurt, and so sensitive to pain. . . . This is due to the fact. . . ." The finger was ready to go up again. But Roshchin, his face distorted, interrupted the speaker:

"Tell me where you met her, and what happened to her."

"We met in the train. . . Ekaterina Dmitrevna had just lost her deeply-loved husband. . . ."

"She was told a deliberate lie! I am alive, as you see."

The German threw himself back in his chair, his small mouth and birdlike eyes grew round, and he brought the palm of his hand down on the table.

"I come into a restaurant I have never in my life been in before, I sit down at this table and take out my notebook. . . . And the dead come to life! Are you this lady's husband? She told me about you, and I pictured you to myself exactly as you are. . . . Come now, Kamerad Roshchin, you shouldn't, you shouldn't, you know. . . ."

Stammering, he pressed his thin lips together, and looked keenly and severely into Vadim Petrovich's eyes, which were brimming with tears. Beads of sweat started out on the Landsturm trooper's benevolently tilted nose.

"I got off the train before Ekaterina Dmitrevna, and your wife gave me her address. I insisted on that, I didn't want to lose sight of her, as if she were merely a bird of passage. While we were fellow passengers I endeavoured to make her take more cheerful views. She's very intelligent. Her clear, but insufficiently developed mind thirsts for noble, exalted ideas. I said to her: 'Grief is the fate of millions of women in our time—grief and disaster must be converted into a social force. . . . Let your grief give you strength.' 'What do I need strength for?' she asked. 'D'you suppose I want to go on living?' 'You do,' I told her. 'You do want to go on living. The will to live is the most important thing there is. When we see around us nothing but death, disaster and grief, we should understand that it is our own fault that

the causes of all this have not yet been removed, and that we have not made of the world a peaceful and happy habitation for such a wonderful phenomenon as man. Behind us is eternal silence, and in front of us is eternal silence, and it is our duty, in the short space of time at our disposal, so to live that this infinite abyss of silence is filled with the happiness of this short moment. . . . ' I told her that to console her. . . . Then I got off the train and joined my unit. That same night we received information that the train in which your wife was travelling was held up by a band of Makhno men, and looted, and all the passengers taken away in an unknown direction. That is all I can tell you, Kamerad Roshchin."

The entertainment was beginning on the little stage. The piano and the musician with the fuzzy hair were pushed into the wings, and Don Limanado, a celebrated Moscow gag man, made his appearance. He was a good-looking man of uncertain age, with made-up eyes; he wore a dinner jacket and a hard straw hat tilted over his brows.

"I congratulate you, gentlemen, on the German Revolution!" he cried, shaking hands cordially with himself. "I've just come from the railway station. 'Hullo!' says I to a German oberleutnant, 'How's yourself?' 'All right,' says he, 'and how are you?' 'I'm all right, too,' says I. 'It's November already, and it's too cold for a straw hat, but I left my winter hat in Moscow, and now I don't know how I'll ever get it.' 'You just buy yourself a winter hat,' says he. 'I saved up a thousand marks to get a hat,' says I, 'and today I only got five rubles for them.' 'Tchk, tchk, tchk!' says he. 'Tchk, tchk, tchk!' says I. Well, we stood there chatting about this and that, while his soldiers were climbing on to the tops of the coaches. 'You going away?' says I. 'That's right,' says he. 'For good?' says I. 'For good,' says he. 'Very sorry,' says I. 'Can't be helped,' says he. 'In what sense can't it be helped?' says I. 'In the sense that there's no sense in it,' says he. 'Tchk, tchk, tchk,' says I. 'We hoped it wouldn't happen in your parts.' And then the soldiers began bawling *Apple Darling* from the tops of the coaches, and I made myself scarce. . . . All round was darkness, and the wind howling, and shooting in side streets, and me late for my engagement, and my heart in my boots. So I started singing."

At this, the piano struck up noisily from the wings, and Don Limanado, with a leap into the air, and a shuffling movement of his feet, burst into song:

*Apple, my darling,
The night is so dark!
Where shall I go, now,
How should I know now?*

Turning his back on the stage, Roshchin, looking into the eyes of the strange German, said:

"Could you tell me what district Makhno is operating in now?"

"According to our latest reports Makhno is causing serious trouble to the retreating Austrians, and, here and there, to German military units. . . . He has taken up his headquarters in Gulyai-Polye again. . . ."

* X *

In the beginning of November the Kachalin Regiment was sent to the rear pending reinforcement, and for a much-needed rest. By the end of the fighting there were barely three hundred men left in it. Pyotr Nikolayevich Melshin, who, somewhat to his own surprise, received a brigade, said a word at headquarters, and at his proposal Telegin, at the moment in hospital, was appointed Commander of the Kachalin Regiment, Sapozhkov, his second-in-command, and Ivan Gora, regimental commissar. Telegin's former battery was incorporated in the artillery of the regiment.

Wet days set in, saturated with the smell of smoke from kitchen chimneys and damp clothing. Water dripped from roofs which were dark with moisture, the earth turned to mire, and the boots of the soldiers returning from drill were weighed down with mud. But the bloody harvest was nearly in—the Don Army had been driven well beyond the right bank of the river. At Novocherkassk Ataman Krasnov was said to be beating his head against the wall in his despair at the news of his second terrible defeat at Tsaritsyn.

When the day, with its drill, its political study, its "liquidation of illiteracy" circle, was over, the Red Army men,

shivering in the frosty air, wandered about the village—some to friends, some to a newly acquired *kuma**, while those who had neither friends nor relations simply walked up and down singing, or, finding a dry spot, tried to lure the village girls with their fooling. But very often the laughter and fooling ended in disputes which were sometimes extremely acrimonious, for everyone's nerves were on edge.

Of the ten sailors in Telegin's battery, two were seriously wounded, and three killed. Only five were left. These sailors were quartered on a good Cossack farm, abandoned by the fleeing owner. With them was Anisya, now officially enrolled in the company as a noncombatant. She drilled, did target practice, and attended political circles on equal terms with the men. She wore a neat Red Army uniform, but refused to have her beautiful curly hair cut. After witnessing, in these October days of unintermittent strain, so much horror and death, she had waded through her own irremediable grief, as a man up to his neck in water, fords a river. Her face, which had become younger and a little harder, had lost the disfiguring wrinkles; rear rations had sent back the colour to her cheeks, improved her carriage, and given elasticity to her step, and her whole being seemed to have been cleansed and refreshed. At night, when the sailors were snoring powerfully in the well-heated hut, she secretly washed, darned and mended their clothes, and sometimes the long drawn-out sounds of the reveille in the grey dawn would find her still at it.

Another acquisition to the company was Kuzma Kuzmich Nefedov, who was employed as supernumerary clerk to the regiment. When things were at their worst—on the 16th and 17th of October—he had displayed not mere courage, but a kind of reckless daring, while carrying away the wounded under fire. This had been noted by all. Nor was he behind-hand later, when the remnants of the Kachalin Regiment went into counterattack, or on the banks of the Don, when the regiment was relieved and withdrawn to the rear.

One day Ivan Gora, coming across him at the field kitchen, wet-through, muddy, lean, excited, had beckoned to him:

"What am I to do with you, Nefedov? I can't make head

* The godparents at a baptism are thereafter *Kums*—*Kum* and *Kuma*.

or tail of you. An unfrocked priest, and a man well on in years. What makes you stick to us?"

Kuzma Kuzmich sniffed to get rid of a raindrop trickling down his peeling nose, and shot a glance at the Commissar from his gay, hazel eyes.

"I have an affectionate clinging nature, Ivan Stepanovich, I get attached to people. Where am I to go? Where else shall I find human society? I'm a thinking man, you know. . . ."

"That's not it—listen—!"

"As for regimental rations" (Kuzma Kuzmich held up the well-filled pot he was carrying), "I think I've honestly earned that lard and skilly. I don't think anyone will accuse me of having tried to save my skin. My trousers and boots, as you see, I took from the enemy on the field of battle with my own hands. . . . I ask nothing, I'm a burden to no one. And I hope I can be useful in the future, too. Does the revolution need a thinking man, or does it not? It does. You need a clerk with some education—and I'm an educated man—I can even write in Latin and Greek. . . . There are all sorts of ways I could be of use. . . ."

"And why not, after all, make use of the man, if he's got brains and wants to work?" thought Ivan Gora.

"It's like this," he said aloud. "Your origin worries us—we're afraid you might start putting ideas into the heads of our fellows. . . ."

"There was a time when I was tempted by will-o'-the-wisps," interrupted Kuzma Kuzmich. "There's no denying it. I was led astray. But you need have no fear of propaganda from me any more, the Lord and I have quarrelled. . . ."

"Quarrelled, have you?" repeated Ivan Gora. "Is that a fact? All right, then, come round to my hut in the evening—we'll have a talk."

Kuzma Kuzmich made his appearance at dusk at the Commissar's hut, and found him sitting at the window in his greatcoat and army cap, reading the paper with unconsciously moving lips. Folding up the newspaper, he rose, and locked the door behind his visitor.

"Sit down. Something rather unpleasant has occurred. D'you know how to hold your tongue? But of course if you chatter, it'll be the worse for you. I know everything—I even know what every soldier dreams about in the night. . . ."

He tore a narrow strip of paper from the margin of the newspaper, grunting as he tried to roll it into a tube with clumsy fingers.

"The crops have been harvested and the grain stored, though there has, of course, been some delay in the threshing on account of the military situation. But the people trust us, that's the main thing—they are ready to believe that the Soviet Power has come to stay.... So far, so good.... But—the Feast of the Holy Veil will soon be here...."

Ivan Gora cast a rapid glance at Kuzma Kuzmich, his great nose twitching with embarrassment as he breathed in through the nostrils.

"The Feast of the Holy Veil will soon be here.... Superstition is still alive among the people.... You can't abolish it by decree overnight.... It takes time, you know.... Well, never mind that.... The girls are sulking—the feast is nearly here, and no matchmakers are being sent. I was in the village of Spasskoye yesterday. The women stopped my carriage and started crying and scolding and laughing. They're in sympathy with the Soviets, but they can't forget this Holy Veil business.... It's a rich village, they have plenty of grain, and no tax in kind has been imposed on them so far. They need careful handling, so that they give their grain of their own accord.... But how was I to make popaganda with the women hanging on to my reins and yelling for a priest? I tried to put them to shame: I asked them if they hadn't had enough of their priests waving their censers before General Mamontov.... 'Those were White priests,' they said. 'We drove them out of the village ourselves—you send us a Red priest ... we've got to have weddings, our girls are tired of waiting, besides,' they said, 'we have hundreds of babies screaming unchristened in their cradles....' Phew! I tell you, my head ached the whole of the next day.... They upset me so, the hussies! How can I send them a priest? But the question must be settled. They'll put their heads together, and at last they'll send to Novocherkassk for the old priest.... And that'll mean a conflict.... You know all about this sort of thing, Kuzma Kuzmich. Help me out. Take the carriage, go to the village, talk to the women.... But leave me out of it. I saw those girls—ripe for the picking." Ivan Gora pointed

at his own chest. "After all it's only human, isn't it? Will you go?"

"With pleasure," replied Kuzma Kuzmich, tossing his head and pursing up his lips.

"What you say is so tedious, Sharigin. Anyone would think your brains had dried up. It's enough to drive one crazy!"

Latugin picked up his cap, put it on crooked, the peak over one ear, and shifted his limbs on the bench without getting up. His eyeballs rolled and came to rest on Anisya.

She was sitting, frowning from the effort at concentration, her eyes fixed, as they always were during instruction, on some one object, say a nail in the wall. Her untutored brain had difficulty in taking in abstract ideas—like words from a foreign language, they only reached her consciousness in fragments, in occasional sparks. The word "socialism" suggested to her something dry and rustling, like a red ribbon, its pile catching on the skin of work-roughened hands. She often dreamed about this ribbon. "Imperialism" reminded her of an old, fly-blown print of King Nebuchadnezzar, wearing a crown and a mantle painted a glaring purple. The king had dropped his sceptre and orb at the sight of the hand writing on the wall the words: *mene, tekel, upharsin*. . .

But Anisya was persevering, and did her best to overcome these highly imperfect conceptions. She could feel Latugin's eyes fixed on her, but only, without looking away from the nail on the wall, slowly moved her knees till they touched.

"Is what I say so dull, Latugin? The article we are studying comes out of *Izvestia*. Don't you like it?" inquired Sharigin. "If you consider yourself a fighter for the revolution, then you must, every time you load your rifle, bear in mind both the situation at the moment, and our general aims."

With these words, Sharigin turned the languishing glance of his fine, blue eyes upon Anisya, who kept her eyes fixed on the nail. Baikov ejaculated in his reedy voice, and in perfect seriousness:

"What's the good of a waistcoat to a wolf? It'll only get it torn on the bushes. To the trifler and dunce, study will always seem tiresome."

"Very neat!" replied Latugin, with equal gravity. "But perhaps not so very true. It is not learning itself that wearies

the dunce and trifler. I can respect learning when it is productive. It's when a man can't tell the elephant's tail from its trunk that one gets bored. A true word, like a woman, has fire in its embrace—a man would be ready to go barefoot over live coals to hear it. . . . That's what I want to hear from you, Sharigin . . . and you do nothing but harp on your 'world proletariat and socialism'. . . . I'm ready to lay down my life for it! I do want to be told about it, but in a way I can understand. I want to be told where stands the tree I must fell to build the house, where lies the meadow I'm to walk in my silk shirt. . . . You need to be hit on the head with the terrestrial globe to teach you how to talk about 'world revolution.' "

Anisya glanced at his strong, broad face, the eyes set wide apart, like a pedigree bull's, and told herself angrily that it would be better for her to be struck blind than gaze too long upon that face.

Neither Gagin, Zaduviter, nor Baikov approved of Latugin's behaviour. They enjoyed the peaceful chats to the accompaniment of the rain falling gently on the straw thatch. Of course Sharigin, too young to have thoroughly digested his knowledge, expressed himself clumsily sometimes, and shunned simple words, as if he was afraid they would entrap him. He felt more at his ease with well-tried, foreign words. Just the same, Latugin had no right to make fun of an honest comrade like that—besides, everyone knew that the real reason for his aggressiveness was quite a different one, and one that they did not approve of, either.

"The Commissar is organizing a food detachment," Gagin told him. "Go and ask him to include you in it. You get bored with nothing to do, and that's no good, you know. You're getting stale, old man. . . ." Baikov laughed, his beard wagging. Zaduviter understood the hint, too, and showed his strong teeth in a roar of laughter. Anisya blushed so violently that the tears came into her eyes. Picking up her greatcoat, she turned aside and put it on, drawing the belt tight and going out of the hut. Everyone felt awkward. Sharigin folded up the paper with a smile.

"Come on—let's have a talk," he said to Latugin, who narrowed his eyes and said: "Let's!"

They went out into the darkness, the fine drizzle tickling their faces. Sharigin could feel the sneering smile on Latu-

gin's face, and knew he was only waiting for him to begin talking, in order to give some caustic, insolent retort. . . . All Sharigin wanted was quietly to raise the question of the infringement of comradely discipline, and of the need of freeing oneself from the rotten heritage of bourgeois instincts. . . . But instead of saying this he took a deep breath of the damp night air, and blurted out: . . .

"Leave Anisya alone . . . it's wrong . . . it's beastly. . . you're only fooling. . . ."

He said not another word. And Latugin, dumbfounded at the turn things were taking, stood motionless before him. He could think of no fitting reply. Should he say: "Who asked you, you ninny, you prissy, you goody-goody, to look after me?" or: "Plenty of people have said things like that to me, but very few of them have escaped with a whole skin"? Either way, he, Latugin, would show himself a dirty dog. . . . A burning sense of injury rose up in him. In former times he would have fought it out there and then. . . . He narrowed his eyes and gritted his teeth . . . that way wouldn't do now. . . .

"That's right!" he said. "You want to tell me that I have shed my blood in vain, that I'm still a tramp, a bandit, a son-of-a-bitch—is that it? Thanks for letting me know, Misha!"

Turning towards the gate he banged furiously on the wicket with his fist.

Life was gradually returning to Ivan Ilyich. (Besides the nervous shock, he was wounded in many places by tiny fragments of steel from a bursting shell.) At first he was unconscious all the time. Then unconsciousness was succeeded by sleep, with short intervals for food. Later he began to feel a blissful sensation of peace. His eyes were bandaged. He had a room to himself with closely curtained windows. Occasionally he heard light footsteps, a whisper scarcely louder than the rustling of leaves, the tinkling of a spoon, the swish of a skirt. A watch ticked continuously somewhere behind him—now louder, now more faintly. There were the only external sensations which reached him—these, and his awareness of some discreet, as yet invisible, being. If he as much as sighed there would immediately be a barely per-

ceptible movement of the air, and the "being" would bend over him, emanating a faint, fresh perfume. . . .

Every now and then another being, much coarser, exuding a strong smell of sweat and a still stronger one of tobacco, made its presence felt.

"Well, how's the pulse?"

The delicate being would answer in an almost inaudible whisper. But the coarse one would boom out cheerfully:

"Splendid! A sound constitution! The great thing is to see that he has absolute quiet, no external irritants of any description. . . ."

Ivan Ilyich slowly formulated the words in his own mind: "You're an external irritant yourself. . . . Go away, stop your buzzing. . . . And you, kind being, bend down, straighten something, or, better still, stroke my hand. . . . You see—I only thought about it, and she understood. Who can this nurse be? Where did they find such a sweet one?"

He was not allowed to talk. But nobody could prevent him thinking. It was years since he had had a chance of being alone with himself, free from remorse or cares. It was a great reward for all these hard years of honest service. He had never done anything dishonest, and his conscience dozed as peacefully as an old tabby on a rainy day. His thoughts wandered in some half-fantastic world. They returned again and again to the northern summer sunlight, as he remembered it on cool days in Petersburg, flooding the bluish asphalt of the wind-swept pavements. . . . How much had been thought and experienced in Petersburg. . . . And then the window of a wooden house came into sight beneath his closed eyelids, the sun shining faintly on the bubbles in the windowpanes, behind them something, something. . . . But the memory faded and vanished, leaving behind it nothing but the tender sorrow its fleeting touch had evoked. . . .

The words of a long-forgotten song haunted his memory persistently. He could not quite remember where he had heard it, perhaps it was in Novaya Derevnya, on the other side of the Krestovka river, where he had spent a summer holiday. In the blue twilight a gaunt, dreamy gipsy woman had sung it under her breath, plucking at the strings of her guitar: the taunting words told the listener to turn to the right, and then to the left, to go all round the house by a dark passage, till he came to a door on the right, leading into

an attic, and ended with the warning that that which he sought he would never find.

She had sung to men sitting silently on their chairs before her—had sung of the eternal longing without which life would not be life. . . . Seek, seek—look into the attic, perhaps it's there. Oh you foolish ones—you must have been drinking! Who is it you seek? You are walking down the long street towards the northern sunset, the breeze eddying the dust beneath your feet, you are seeking, seeking . . . where is the little window with the bubbly windowpanes? Isn't it there, on the window sill, that the dearest of all is sitting in a print dress, her legs tucked beneath her, reading a book, and the book is about you, who are coming, seeking. But that's all nonsense . . . it's yourself you are seeking.

In the silence and dark, to the ticking of the watch, Ivan Ilyich dozed and dreamed: as life came back to him his self-esteem, hidden deep down in him, and severely censored, began to awake. In this half-fantastic world he seemed to have gathered up all his memories, the best, the purest, the most loving—all that which men lose on their way through the world, and seldom recover. Self-esteem came back to him with returning health. He was beginning to eat with appetite, and would stretch luxuriously when the nurse wasn't looking. One day, after a good sleep, and a meal of buckwheat porridge, he settled himself comfortably on the pillow, and said in surprisingly loud tones:

"May I have a little talk with you, Sister dear—all about nothing, you know?"

She bent over him hurriedly:

"Sh!" she whispered in alarm and placed the palm of her hand over his lips. "Sh!"

But as soon as she removed her hand he said again, quite saucily this time:

"Then you talk to me! What a nice little hand you have! How old are you? What's your name?"

She gave several short sighs, something between sobs and gasps. There was something queer about her. And this is what he wanted to say to her: "It suddenly came into my head when I waked up . . . if a man has no love for himself, he can never have love for anybody—and what's the good of him? Blackguards and dastards, for instance—they don't love themselves. . . . They sleep badly, they itch all over, now

they're choking with rage, now they're shaking with fear. . . . A man ought to love himself, and love in himself what another could love him for. . . . Especially a woman—his own woman. . . .”

But Ivan Ilyich did not say any of this, and the nurse left the room, soon to come back with the doctor, the foe of external irritants, who began buzzing worse than ever:

“Getting frisky, old man? No, no. . . . A few words, the most necessary, I allow. . . . It's my duty to send you back to your regiment in the best possible shape. And it's your duty, my fine fellow, to get well as quickly as possible. . . . Give him a sleeping pill, nurse.”

“Stop here, friend, I'll walk the rest of the way,” said Kuzma Kuzmich.

“Why should you walk?”

“You leave me alone. I shall go there like a pilgrim—see?”

“It's your affair. . . .”

Latugin reined in the well-nourished gelding. They were in deeply-rutted road beside a dam, above which gnarled willows were beginning to shed their leaves. The village of Spasskoye stood on the other side of a pond, its threshing sheds, stacked with fresh straw, coming right down to the flat shore. Smoke was curling above the reed thatch which lay snug and warm over the clay huts.

“The whole village is brewing *samogon*,” said Latugin and heaved a deep sigh. He turned his gaze to some sleek, pompous, white geese waddling across the dam. The gander at their head halted in disapproval at the sight of the waiting cart and the two men, and the fifty or so geese at his back halted too. Then they held quacking consultation, and waddled down the slope beside the dam, their bellies touching the ground, till, as if propelled by the light breeze, they slid on to the dark surface of the water and made for the marshy ground on the other side.

“There'd be fifteen pounds of meat on a goose like that, the brute,” said Latugin. “It simply cries out to be roasted, that it does!”

“Off with you, dear friend!”

Kuzma Kuzmich hurriedly extended his hand in farewell.

"And tell the Commissar I'm staying to have a look round, and find out what's going on. You can come with the food detachment in a week's time. Everything will be settled amicably."

"You'll get properly soused here, Kuzma!"

"I never touch the stuff, friend. Go on, now, turn the horse, or somebody will see us. . . ."

Latugin turned the cart, flicked the heavy-rumped horse angrily with a twig, and drove off without so much as a backward glance. Kuzma Kuzmich in the meantime was crossing the dam to get to the village. His jacket, green with age, made long ago from a priest's greatcoat, was tied round the waist with a print kerchief, a Red Army kitbag of sacking hung at his back, and on his head was a cap with a high crown, dating back to the imperialist war of evil memory. In a word, his appearance was just what it ought to have been.

Late autumn is a dull time in the country. The leaves have fallen from the cherry trees and apple trees, and lie in heaps, damp from the evening frosts, on the turned sods of the empty vegetable beds. Nothing is left of the sunflowers—which the people think draw the sun's rays to the small windows of the huts—but rotting stems sticking out of the earth. Mud is everywhere, up to the very doors. The bleached shutters creak and bang in the chill wind, and there is not the least temptation to look out of the window, for all you will see is a crow on the wattle fence, morosely waiting for the farmer's wife to throw out something it can pick up and eat. . . .

"They live in a stupor, grunting and scratching themselves. Their passions sleep, even their desires are unimaginative. . . . And yet each one is created in the mould and image of an Aristotle or a Pushkin. Each has two eyes with which to gaze upon the ever-new wonders of the world. . . . Each has a head on his shoulders—in itself the wonder of wonders. . . ." (Here Kuzma Kuzmich fairly tossed up his head in the high cap.) "Compared with the universe, of course, this head simply doesn't exist. On the other hand, the universe is contained within this head—this head can penetrate mysteries which are closed to the God of the Bible. . . . So why waste one's life looking at crows through the window?"

In thoughts of this kind, smacking his lips in great content,

Kuzma Kuzmich passed by low wattle fences and huts which seemed weighed down by their reed thatches. On his way he encountered a girl in high boots and a short sheepskin jacket, carrying two buckets of water on a yoke attached to her shoulders. She was broad-limbed, stately, and unfriendly.

"Good day! Your name's Nadezhda, isn't it? Am I right?"

The girl stood still and slowly turned her broad face towards him.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I'm a seer."

"There aren't any seers, now. Get away with you!"

"Since you drive me away," said Kuzma Kuzmich, "I shall go back to the steppe and count the funeral barrows. It's a long, long way for a man all alone. It's a long way, God knows...."

The girl's lips twitched. She made as if to go on but came to a halt again, casting a suspicious glance at the stranger's smiling, infinitely cunning visage. Kuzma Kuzmich flung out his hands.

"If I feel sleepy I can lie down on a hayrick, if I'm hungry, I can always find something to steal.... That's not what I want, my dear.... Prophets walked barefoot over the sharp stones, and still they prophesied. Holy men stood on pillars and lived on locusts.... Do you know what locusts are? They're grasshoppers.... And what did they suffer for? Tell me that! That's set you thinking...." (He moved towards her, his lips protruding.) "They loved man.... Every human being is a miracle, and you, Nadezhda, are a twofold miracle.... Do you know what I can see? You have threshed the wheat and distilled the *samogon*, everywhere there's a smell of roast pork.... You have all you want. But no light.... no."

"Are you selling paraffin, or what?" said the girl, looking over her shoulder at him, her self-assurance somewhat shaken.

"I'm not selling anything, and I don't want any charity. I've come to you to be happy, and to make you happy."

The girl said nothing, only shot him another glance from long eyes, like grey pools. Bending her knees, she deposited the buckets on the ground, and laid the yoke across them.

"It's dismal in the village, nobody can make us happy.... How do *you* intend to try?"

"If I say so, it means I know a way. I'm an unfrocked priest."

The girl's mouth opened, and it was so fresh, and displayed a row of such even white teeth, that Kuzma Kuzmich fairly stamped with pleasure. And suddenly all her unfriendliness vanished, as if blown off her face by the wind.

"Oh!" she cried, placing her hand on her bosom, over which the sheepskin jacket did not meet. "Oh!" she cried again, her broad thighs swaying. "Come to our hut then.... My father will talk to you, he has the key of the church...."

"No," said Kuzma Kuzmich. "I won't do that. You'll come for me—see if you don't, my black-browed beauty...."

Winking, he threw back his shoulders with a debonair air, and moved down the village street, keeping his eye open for the poorest-looking dwelling he could find.

At last the day came when the bandage was removed from Ivan Ilyich's eyes. This was done in the dusk. Behind the half-open door the nurse was saying something to the doctor in a frightened whisper.... "Nonsense!" said the doctor more than once. "A man isn't hothouse plant. Do as I tell you...." The nurse went back to the bed, bending over it so low that her fine hair tickled Ivan Ilyich's nose, and lifted the bandage. Then for the first time, instead of rustling and whispers, he heard her voice—faint and hesitant:

"Lie very still please, till you get used to the light." It was not without a certain fear that he opened his eyes after the long, long spell of darkness. Everything was blurred. The room was in half-light, one corner of the blanket serving as a window curtain having been drawn back. The nurse was seated at a small table at the foot of the bed. He could not make out her features, for she was bending low doing something with a bandage.

Ivan Ilyich lay back, smiling. Overhead was a sloping ceiling—over there must be the staircase to the attic, and there was the window with the bubbly glass. He could not have wished for a nicer place.... And suddenly, as if tearing freshly-forming skin from a wound, the memory of another place stole back to him, full of smoke and thunder, of the earth gouged into hollows, of a sulphur-coloured explosion which had dazzled and blinded him.... "Not that—not that!"

he told himself, trying to drive away the memories before they had time to work their way into his brain. . . . Once again he could hear the ticking of the watch, softly and painlessly measuring out the even intervals of life. . . .

"Nurse," called out Ivan Ilyich. "I can't see you properly."

She shook her head. The bandage slipped off her knees, unwinding itself, and she started rolling it up again. Her movements were light, she must be quite young. . . . But how experienced she was! He tried hard to see her face, but the dusk thickened, and now he could only just make out the indistinct outlines of her coarse linen smock and the kerchief which covered her shoulders like the sphinx's coif.

"I see, I see . . . the poor girl must be pock-marked, or as ugly as sin. Of course she feels how grateful I am to her." Ivan Ilyich sighed. "There are so many of them—the tender, devoted ones, friends to the bitter end. She's probably ever so clever, the plain ones always are. . . . Those are the ones to marry, and to love, too. . . . But a man will do anything to have a pretty face with doll-like eyelashes beside him on the pillow, whispering all sorts of silly rot. . . . Dasha was different—I didn't love her just for her beauty. . . ." Ivan Ilyich closed his eyes and leaned his cheek on his fist. "You're lying," he told himself. "It was for her singular beauty that you loved her. . . . And that wasn't what she wanted. . . ."

The nurse, evidently believing him to be asleep, rose noiselessly and went out of the room. She was away a long time, but at last the door creaked softly and a dim yellow light appeared. Ivan Ilyich, without moving, half opened his eyes. He saw Dasha enter, in a white smock and nurse's coif. She was carrying a small tin lamp, shielding the flame with rosy, translucent fingers. He was not a bit surprised to see her, but he did not believe that it really was Dasha.

She set the lamp on the table, turned down the wick, sat down, and began looking at Ivan Ilyich. Her face was as thin as that of a little girl not long recovered from an attack of typhus. There was a faint line on either side of her slightly pouting lips. The light fell on a cheek and eye, and the eye looked calm and very big, the flame of the lamp reflected in a tiny point in the pupil. She seemed to have settled down for a long vigil, her elbow resting on her knee, and her chin on the palm of her hand. No one but Dasha could sit like that.

... That evening in Petersburg, when she had come to the "Centre for the Struggle Against Convention," in Telegin's flat, when he saw her for the first time, she had seemed to him as lovely as the spring. Her cheeks were flushed, she was hot in her black cloth dress. A delicate perfume had invaded the room in which the poets, the participators in the "splendid blasphemies", were sitting on planks laid across wooden blocks. She had sat with her chin on her small fist, listening to the pretentious verses, the tip of her little finger touching her rather full, pouting lips. Afterwards he had carried the chair she sat on into his study. . . .

All this flashed into his memory between two heartbeats. His heart began pounding louder and louder at his chest, like a watchman striking the hour at midnight. This woman seated on the stool at the foot of the bed couldn't possibly be Dasha! Lying motionless, he gazed avidly at her from beneath half-closed eyelids. . . . Evidently she noticed this, for she suddenly leaned forward on her stool. . . .

"Nurse!" he called, opening his eyes wide and trying to raise himself to a sitting position. Dasha sprang towards him with a faint cry, at once joyous and startled. . . . He put his arms round her shoulders as if he were afraid the vision would fade away. . . . It was Dasha, thin, frail, but alive! He pressed her face against him, feeling how her lips, her whole body, were trembling. . . . He took her head in his hands and held it from him, the better to look into the beloved, ever new, ever unexpectedly lovely face. She kept reiterating, her eyes closed:

"I am with you—everything's all right. . . ."

He began kissing her mouth, the corners of that mouth where suffering had engraved two hair-thin lines, and her closed eyes.

"You must calm yourself now, Ivan dear," she whispered. "I'm never going away, I'll be with you for ever and ever. . . ."

By the evening the whole village knew that there was a stranger in the hut of the poor widow Anna Trekhzhilnaya—a man who had met Nadya Vlasova in the village street and told her that he was a priest from the Reds and had come to make them happy. All the women, young and old, believed

this. Nadya's tongue fairly ached from recounting the same thing over and over again—how she had been carrying the pails, and had felt a kind of premonition, and he had suddenly called out: "Nadezhda!" (Here the women listening to her would interrupt her with cries of: "Good Lord, how did he know her name?") "He's a seer—that's how!" He had such a Russian face, as red as beef, his hair hung over his shoulders, and he was dressed so very poorly, but he didn't look hungry, and he was full of fun, and talked in riddles....

The men laughed at the women's chatter. "Let's hope that seer doesn't set fire to the village from end to end.... If he was a real priest, his first act would have been to go to the richest hut.... There isn't enough even for the cockroaches to eat at Trekhzhilnaya's.... No, good wives, he must be taken to the village Soviet and made to show his papers.... Perhaps he's come to spy for the bandits.... Then where would you be?"

"Enough of your sneering," said a wife to her husband. "You only make people laugh at you," and the other women supported her unanimously. "Before the Revolution we used to obey you!" she continued, her eyes gleaming dauntlessly, "and we never got any good from your orders." She stuck her hands on her powerful hips. "Our heads are just as good as yours, and we have a lot more sense.... Dear souls...." Here she turned to address the women, "just look at my Nadya! She's bursting out of her blouse.... She keeps looking at herself in the glass and calling me: 'Mamma!' she says, 'Mamma, what's to become of me?' What's she to do—wait till the next Feast of the Holy Veil?" She turned to her husband again: "You want to know why he didn't come to your hut to guzzle roast pork? Did Christ only go to the rich? He went to that poor wretch of an Anna because he's a *Red* priest, he doesn't want your pork—he thinks about our grievous plight."

There was nothing for the man to do, but wave his hand at her and take himself off. In the evening the women clustered around Anna's hut, while they sent their deputies inside. Before entering, the deputies learned from a neighbour's little girl that Anna Trekhzhilnaya had heated her bathhouse that morning (a miserable smoke-blackened shanty behind the huts, on the bank of the lake) and the priest had washed himself there, and she had given him a clean shirt

belonging to her late husband. After his wash, the priest sat down to have a cup of herb tea with Anna. (This beverage did duty as tea in the village.)

There he was seated on a bench in the faded blue shirt, his arms resting on the table. Nadya had told the truth—his face was red enough to scare a body, but a complacent smile hovered over his lips. The widow was frying eggs on a fire of chips; a roaring blue flame showed here and there through the holes in the pipe fixed between the samovar and the flue in the stove.

The three deputies entered, bowing and saying: "Good day!" as they seated themselves on a bench near the door. They asked no questions, but nothing escaped their notice.

"Tell us your errand!" said Kuzma Kuzmich loudly and suddenly. The deputies blinked. One of them, Nadezhda's mother, replied in honeyed tones:

"They say the old customs have been abolished. But we like old customs, Father. A wedding only happens once, and life is long. . . . That's right, isn't it?"

"The longer you live, the greater your possessions," said Kuzma Kuzmich. "So what are you waiting for?"

"You needn't be afraid of us, we're for the Soviets. We elected a village Soviet, we voted for the Soviets. We've put seals on the church door and passed a resolution to send the priest to the district Cheka for being in possession of a machine gun."

"Aha!" said Kuzma Kuzmich. "Your priest meant business, I see."

"If you knew how that priest used to threaten us: 'I'll fire my Maxim out of my window on your meeting, Antichrists!' he said. That's how he tried to frighten us. . . . Of course our maidens voted with the rest, but when the Feast of the Holy Veil came round, they wanted to be married in church. They all got together and stuck to it—and when girls get together, you know, it's hard to get them apart. So you tell us what to do. Is it true you were unfrocked?"

"Quite right," said Kuzma Kuzmich.

"What for?"

"For being a free thinker. I've quarrelled with God."

The deputies exchanged frightened glances. Nadezhda's mother whispered into the ears of the other women, who

whispered back into her ear. Then, with a harsher note in her voice, she said:

"So it wouldn't be a real wedding?"

"Why not? So long as the girl wants it. . . . I'll marry her and enter it in the book, and not even the Ecumenical Council will be able to unmarry her. And I'll hold the crown over her as if she were the Queen of Diamonds, and lead the young couple round the lectern, and ask all the proper questions, and say all the proper things, and we'll make merry and feast with clear consciences. What more do you want?"

Another deputy said:

"And our infants are unbaptized, unnamed."

"How many?"

"A great many. We can have them counted."

"And do they suck worse for being unbaptized?"

Again the deputies exchanged glances, shrugging their shoulders. The widow set the frying pan on the table, and, moving back to the stove, looked on impassively as Kuzma Kuzmich shovelled the fried eggs into his mouth with a spoon, closing his eyes in his enjoyment of the food.

"And will the baptism be a proper one?" asked the second deputy.

"As good as in the times of Vladimir the Holy."

"How will you hold the service, without a deacon and without a choir?"

"What do I want them for? I'll manage all alone—in different voices."

Then Nadezhda's mother moved nearer and sat down beside him, smiting the table with the side of her hand.

"Do you charge a lot?"

Kuzma Kuzmich did not reply at once. The woman breathed heavily and her hand began to tremble, and the other two deputies, sitting by the door, craned their necks.

"I won't take a kopek from you, so there! That's not what I came here for. You'll only have to pay the clerk in the village Soviet for making out the licenses."

The offer which this man made was in every way a tempting one, but it was also alarming. What if he was a werewolf! Only six weeks before, when the village was under the heel of Ataman Mamontov, just such a man had appeared, with galoshes on his bare feet, and his beard growing right up to his eyes. He had gone up to a hut in which people were

sitting resting at the end of the day, and stood about till they got used to him, and then sat down by Gaffer Akim. He may have thought someone would offer him a smoke, but nobody did. Then he threw one leg over the other and whispered in the old man's ear: "Don't you know me, old soldier?" "No, Sir." Then he whispered, still more mysteriously: "Know, then, that I am the Emperor Nikolai the Second, it was not me they executed in Ekaterinburg, I go about the earth secretly, till the time comes to make myself known".... Gaffer Akim was hard of hearing, he didn't catch all the man said, so he had to raise his voice. Our folk are no fools—they immediately dragged this emperor off to the dam, to drown him in the pool, and he only saved his life by shouting again and again: "Brothers! Brothers, I was only joking!..."

"You don't look like one of those God's fools—besides their day is over," said Nadezhda's mother, who was now so warm that she had to unfasten her jacket. "Why don't you take money? What's in your mind? How can we trust you?"

"I'm fond of salt. At every farm where I hold weddings and baptisms, let them give me a pinch of salt." Kuzma Kuzmich put down the spoon and turned to the widow. "Let's have the samovar! Look at her—" addressing the deputies he pointed to Anna, so lean, so flat-chested, with her dark, lowered face, in her patched, tucked up skirt—" she trusts me, she'd follow me anywhere. And you, well-fed, sleek ones, you're always looking for something bad in a man, always suspecting him of being a rogue. You're just a set of kulaks, I am tired of you. If you anger me, the moment day breaks I shall go away and seek my fortune elsewhere."

Anna set the samovar down on the table, and the deputies saw that she was smiling, her plain, haggard face radiant with joy. Nadezhda's mother cast a sweeping, hawk-eyed glance at her.

"Agreed!" she said, holding her hard hand out to Kuzma Kuzmich. "Don't be angry, why should you go further when you can get all you need here?"

Early next morning Kuzma Kuzmich climbed up to the belfry and tolled the great bell, and a brazen clangour rang out over the village, drawing the old men and women to the

windows. He tolled the bell a second and third time, seized the ropes of the lesser bells and began ringing rapid, short peals, and then again tolled the great three-hundred-pood bell—boom! Before pious fingers could be raised to foreheads, there was another ting-a-ling-a-ling, as the unfrocked priest tolled the bells in dance time.

Some of the most respected among the village elders came out of their houses, sending disapproving glances up at the belfry.

"The priest is playing the fool."

"He ought to be dragged down by his hair and turned out of the village."

"Turned out! He's the one who'll do the turning out!"

"He does it very well, though. . . . After all, the girls like it, and the wives like it—why shouldn't he give them what they like?"

The whole village, invited or uninvited, prepared for the merrymaking. It was a misty day, with rime on the grass, and a smell of freshly-baked bread and roast pork in the air. There was a bustling in all the farmyards, a quacking and clucking of poultry, as geese and hens tried to make their scurrying escape through gates. . . . In one of the huts a bridegroom, dressed up and newly-shaved, languished on a bench in the icon corner, neither eating, nor smoking. In another, a bride was being attired. The old women, feeling their indispensability in moments like these were teaching her to wail in the approved manner.

*What you hear is not the wild birds cheeping,
But the maiden in her chamber weeping,*

droned an aged beldame in sepulchral tones, while another caught up the tune, mournfully propping her wrinkled cheek on the palm of her hand:

*Farewell, farewell, o, radiant sun!
Farewell, my father dear,
Farewell, my mother!
Married away,
Carried away,
Bartered and sold
For wine and gold
I am driven to foreign parts.*

But not a single bride wanted to wail—the very idea annoyed them.

"That was in your times, Granny, that they drove people away to foreign parts, now the country is one-Soviet."

Everywhere cooking and pie-making was going on, and women were rushing about with pails and brooms. The matchmakers were going from hut to hut, and already smelling strongly of spirits. The young people were beginning to gather in the churchyard, where two accordion players were feeling for chords on their instruments.

Just then Stepan Petrovich Nedoyeshkashi, chairman of the village Soviet, a war invalid, four times awarded the St. George Cross, drove up from the post office. Paying not the slightest attention to the bell ringing, appearing, indeed, not so much as to hear it, he unlocked the door of the village Soviet and went in, coming out almost immediately with a hammer and a sheet of paper; he nailed the paper to the door with a nail at each corner, took a seal wrapped up in a scrap of newspaper from his pocket, breathed on it, and applied it to his signature. The paper bore the announcement:

"Citizens of the village of Spasskoye, in connection with the revolution which has occurred in Germany, I hereby call a meeting at 11 o'clock today."

The people crowded up to the village Soviet. Kuzma Kuzmich, seeing from the top that the square in front of the church was empty, stopped tolling the bell and climbed down the belfry steps. Nadezhda's father, who was a church elder and had donned a blue robe trimmed with braid, shut the lid of the candlebox with a bang, saying:

"That son-of-a-bitch Stepan Nedoyeshkashi was after me a whole week last summer, to give him two hundred rubles to get roofing for his hut. And now the one-legged devil is trying to revenge himself. He wants to upset the wedding festivities."

"Why, what's happened?"

"Oh,—another revolution somewhere—Germany, isn't it? He's called a meeting, he can't get on for five minutes without politics! What a fool, my God. . . ."

Stepan Petrovich was addressing the people from the porch of the village Soviet, flaying the air with his fists, his wooden leg knocking on the planks. He had a broad, big-boned, loose-lipped face, and a sparse, bristling moustache.

"The international situation is taking a favourable turn for the Soviet Power!" he was shouting, as Kuzma Kuzmich elbowed his way nearer to the porch. "The Germans are extending a toil-worn hand to us. This will be a great help to our revolution, Comrades. I know the Germans, I've been in Germany. One thing I can tell you: they're tight-fisted, they watch every bite, but they live better than we do. That's a fact we need to think about, Comrades. In a village like ours, they have water pipes, a sewage system carrying the manure to the vegetable beds, a telephone, gas in every house, a barber's shop, a beer shop with a billiard room . . . not to mention their schools . . . not to mention the fact that everyone can read and write. . . . There's a bicycle and a gramophone in every home. . . ."

A hum of talk passed over the crowd, someone clapped, and then everybody began clapping.

"I had my lower limb blown off by a German shell in East Prussia. But at the present moment I am able to rise above personal considerations. . . ."

A youthful voice cried desperately:

"Speak more plainly!"

"I do not blame the German people for my unfortunate mutilation—it's not their fault, it's the fault of international imperialism . . . they're the ones whose throats should be cut with the utmost resolution. . . . We Russians were the first to realize this, but now even the Germans have realized it. And at this meeting of ours, Comrades, we utter the slogan to both nations: "Three cheers for world revolution!" "

"Hurrah!" shouted a youthful voice, and the meeting again clapped. "I will now turn to local affairs. . . . The roof of our school is leaking like a sieve,—a resolution has been passed about it. I ask you—has the money been collected, have shingles been bought? No. But money for a holiday you have. Money for a priest you find. The tedious pealing of your bells has disturbed people for ten miles round. . . . Is it for this that the Germans are extending toil-worn hands to us? I move a resolution: until a collection has been taken up for repairing the school and paying the schoolmistress for her work, as well as for exercise books and pencils, sufficient to cover a total amount of four thousand nine hundred and seven rubles, seven kopeks—no weddings shall be held or bells pealed. . . ."

The chairman's speech had a marked effect, first and foremost in that it shamed the people. A few other speakers followed him, each echoing his words, adding only that since the wedding preparations had begun there was no point in delaying them, and the money must be collected immediately, not, however, by means of equal contributions all round . . . let those sixteen wealthy farms where there would be weddings, pay. This was the resolution passed by the general meeting.

The brides raised such a racket when they were told of the resolution, and abused their parents so roundly, that the fathers counted out the sum with moistened thumbs and took it to the village Soviet. Stepan Petrovich gave receipts, and only said. "Go ahead!"

It was nearly evening by the time the brides were led to the church. The onlookers gasped to see the finery in which they were decked out—coats with fur collars and fur linings, veils fringed with gold and silver, high-heeled shoes in which the brides seemed to be walking on the tips of their toes. And when they took off their wraps in the porch—Good Lord, what dresses! Did you ever see the like? Dresses of every colour, so tight over the hips that they almost burst at the seams, so full and frilly at the hems, bare necks—why, Nadezhda Vlasova's arms were bare up to the shoulders!

"Look, look! Can that be Olga Golokhvastova?" "Just look at Steshka!" "Where did they get it all?" "Everyone knows that—she and her father took flour and lard five times on their ox cart to Novocherkassk. . . . They got all that in exchange from the Novocherkassk ladies. . . ."

Certain knowing individuals declared:

"I've been to the dances at the Governor's—but they were nothing to this!"

"Dances! There was a tercentenary of the Romanovs in Novocherkassk, all the fine ladies went to the cathedral, they came in carriages, and walked over a carpet, but they couldn't compare with these. . . ."

Kuzma Kuzmich appeared without a chasuble, in a long vestment, a greasy priest's skullcap over his bald spot. (The former priest had not only escaped from arrest, but had managed to rob the vestry, too.) Kuzma Kuzmich let his glance rest on the brides—full-bosomed, rosy-cheeked

beauties! The bridegrooms with their alarmed countenances seemed smaller than the girls. Grunting his satisfaction, he rubbed his cold hands and began the service, speaking quickly and gaily, now gabbling the words in a low murmur, now imitating the deacon's booming voice, now chanting, but all as it should be, word for word, syllable for syllable, as it was written.

The ceremony over, he told the newlyweds to kiss one another, and addressed them as follows:

"In the old days you were spoken to in parables—I will tell you a story from real life. Fifteen years before the revolution I had a parish in a certain remote village. My mind was at that time in great confusion, dear fellow citizens. I'm a Russian, and I have a restless soul, and nothing suited me, nothing would do, everything grieved me, I made everything my business. I was seeking justice. And then something happened which put an end to my doubts. There came to me an old, blind man, led by a little boy. He took a three-ruble note out of the rags tied round his bast shoes, and that was old too. He felt it between his fingers and held it out to me, and said: 'This is for my old woman, pray for her soul. . . .' 'Take back your three rubles, Grandad,' I told him. 'I'll pray for your old woman's soul anyhow. . . . Have you come from far away?' 'From far away—I've been ten days on the road.' 'How old are you?' 'I've lost count, but I must be over a hundred.' 'Have you any children?' 'Not one. They all died. Only my old woman was left, we lived together sixty years—we were fond of one another, she was good to me, and I loved her, and she died. . . .' 'Do you beg your way?' . . . 'That's right . . . be so kind . . . take the three rubles, and say a mass.' 'Never mind that,' I said. 'What's the name?' 'Whose?' 'Your old woman's.' He stared at me from his sightless eyes. Her name? I've forgotten, it's slipped my memory. . . . When she was young we called her the Young One, then I called her Goodwife, and then she got old and I just called her Old Woman. . . .' 'How can I pray for her soul without knowing her name?' He stood there leaning on his staff a long time. 'Ay,' he said, 'I've forgotten. Life was so hard, we were so poor. Very well, I'll go back and find out—there may still be somebody who remembers. . . .' And that old man came back again in the autumn, took the very same three-ruble note out of his shoe: 'I've

found out,' he said. 'There was one person in the village who remembered: she was called Petrovna, her father's name was Petro.' "

The sixteen brides stood there with lowered eyes and pursed lips.

The youthful bridegrooms, in tight collars that made their faces crimson, stood at their sides very still. The congregation too was very quiet—everyone was listening.

"Russians used to grow like dock leaves, not even remembering their own names. The gentry lived like lords, the merchants raked in money by the fistful. We clergy swung our censers, and you, my beauties, in those accursed times would not have felt the warm blood coursing in your veins, but would have faded like weed-choked flowers, before you came to blossom."

Kuzma Kuzmich came to a stop here, as if in reflection, removed his cap and scratched his bald spot.

"May we go now?" asked Nadezhda Vlasova in a low voice.

"Wait a minute.... And in my declining years I have lived to see true justice.... Not the justice which Nekrasov* wrote of. You've read his books, I expect. And not the justice I used to dream of sitting beside the river of an evening, by an open fire and fishing and slapping mosquitoes on my neck. Justice is aggressive, threatening, irreconcilable.... To tell the truth I have often feared it myself.... When it comes to firing from machine guns, and riders bearing down on you with drawn swords, philosophy isn't much good." (A wave of restrained laughter passed over his hearers.) "Justice is to be found neither there" (he pointed to the church dome), "nor anywhere around you. Justice is you yourself, valiant soul! Desire and dare! Why do you stare at me like that? Don't I make myself clear? I have come here to teach you to make merry. Today you—" he pointed to each girl as he named her—"Olya, Nadya, Stesha, Katerina—will dance till the planks groan, and the eyes of Nikolai, Fedor and Ivan blaze as if they were mad. That is all... the sermon is over...."

Kuzma Kuzmich turned his back on the congregation and went into the vestry.

* *N. A. Nekrasov* (1821-1877)—great Russian poet and revolutionary democrat.

Ivan Gora, the Regimental Commissar, had just returned from Tsaritsyn, where they had told him that the food detachments which had been sent from Petrograd and Moscow had not in all cases been equal to their task. Among them had been inexperienced persons, embittered by hunger, who had lost their heads when they saw people eating goose in the villages. One such detachment vanished, leaving no traces, another was discovered at the Voronezh railway station in a sealed freight truck, containing the bodies of three Petrograd workers, their bellies ripped open and the cavities stuffed with grain, on the forehead of one the inscription: "Eat your fill."

The Commissar had promised to give aid to the Tsaritsyn comrades. On his return to the regiment he started selecting men for fresh detachments and holding preliminary talks with them. He appointed Latugin, Baikov and Zaduviter to go to Spasskoye, and sent for them to come to his hut. At first the hut had been bare and cold, but since Agrippina had come back from the hospital the floor was swept, there was a door mat on the threshold, and an embroidered towel on the table; it smelt now, not of sour home-grown tobacco but of freshly-baked bread.... Ivan Gora asked his comrades to wipe their feet well before coming in.

"Sit down," he said. "What's your good news?"

"What's yours?" retorted Latugin.

"Why, I've heard that our lads aren't very eager about going for grain."

"What does it matter whether they like it or not! It's got to be done, and they go. But you can't expect us to like it, you know!"

"You see it's a delicate matter."

Ivan Gora, seated with his back to the window, turned to Zaduviter, who was tapping morosely on the table.

"You're a tiller of the soil—what's your opinion of all this?"

"How much wheat do you need from Spasskoye?"

"A good deal. We must get four thousand five hundred poods of grain from the hundred and sixty-two farms. Of course you'll have to discriminate between the rich and the poor."

"They'll hardly give up as much as that."

"That's what I'm sending you for, to persuade them to. I'm sending you unarmed, Comrades."

"We'll do better unarmed," put in Latugin.

"It'll be easier to talk to them," said Baikov, winking. "We're not going to enemies but to our own people."

"Both to our own people, and to our enemies," said Ivan Gora severely.

"Listen, Commissar," said Zaduviter, "I'm not trying to wriggle out, mind! But it's not our job to force ourselves into other people's barns. It's beastly."

"And what have you to say, Latugin?"

"Don't try and turn me inside out, Ivan. We'll bring you grain, and let that suffice you."

"And you, Baikov?"

"I'm from the White Sea coast, I'm used to working with others."

"This is what I called you for, Comrades." Ivan Gora laid his great hands on the table, and spoke quietly, like a father talking to his sons. "The grain monopoly is the backbone of the revolution. If we lift the monopoly now, however much blood and sweat we shed, the kulak will be the master. And it won't be the huckster of the old days, with his paunchy samovar, but a shrewd, hard-headed, out-and-out kulak.

"What is a kulak?" cried Zaduviter. "You tell me that! I have two cows on my farm. What am I?"

"It's not a matter of cows, but of who's to be in power. The village kulak thinks of nothing else, day in, day out. He has dismissed his labourer and slaughtered his cow, and hasn't ploughed his land in the autumn; he shouts at meetings and votes for the Soviets. He's as spry as a flea."

"Very well, Ivan. So I go home and buy another cow or a team of bullocks. What does that make me?"

"Did you go into the Red Army of your own free will, or under compulsion?"

"Of my own free will, of course," replied Zaduviter.

"Then you won't be buying any cattle."

"Why not? I don't see why I shouldn't!"

"Your interests should be wider. You didn't take up your rifle on account of those two bullocks."

"He'll buy the bullocks, all right," said Latugin. "What are you plaguing him for? Go on!"

Smiling, Ivan Gora shook his head.

"I won't argue . . . but one likes to feel that one can trust people. . . . Very well, then. . . . What are the aims of this class? The aim of the kulaks is to get the grain trade into their hands. The revolution has opened the eyes of the kulak. He is no longer just a village shopkeeper, it isn't a tavern he dreams about any more, it's grain elevators and steamships. If he is the one to ride the revolution, Zaduiviter, you'll be working for him till you sweat blood, and your bullocks will be his bullocks. He even hopes to turn the monopoly to his advantage. I remember one case: I got to a village with a food detachment, and nothing we could do was any good—obstinate hostility, there was no persuading them. Their bloodsucker, Babulin, was there, in a worn sheepskin coat, and patched felt boots, ever so polite and obliging, only he kept nibbling the tips of his beard. . . . What's up? I wondered. We went to his barns—not a grain to be seen. Of course we did some digging, but we could find nothing. In the farmyard nothing but a wretched nag and a couple of cowhides hanging from the roof. And what do you think he had done? He got wind of our coming, the son-of-a-bitch, and went about talking to the peasants: 'My, oh my, the tsar's police never treated you as the Soviet Power is treating you. It's all the same to me,' says he. 'I can go and live with my daughter in the town, she's married to the chairman of the Executive Committee, but you, poor things, how will you live through the winter? The Bolsheviks are taking everything, the very straw will be taken from your roofs for the Red Army. . . . The Lord loves charitable men—go to my barns, brothers, take every last grain. If we live, we'll settle up later.' He was careful to take receipts from them, but still he was a benefactor. . . . Us he gave nothing, but he'll get double quantities back from the peasants. . . . He may seem insignificant but he's everywhere and there are many of him. He's a hard nut to crack. Every bite the peasant has put in his mouth for the last hundred years has passed through the kulak's hands. He knows exactly what can be got out of each one. Yes, lads, the grain monopoly is a fundamental, farsighted policy. It's a difficult one, it's true. But what isn't difficult? It's always hard to plough virgin soil. The only thing that comes easy is playing the balalaika. . . . If the peasant fails to understand this impor-

tant policy, it's you who are to blame, first and foremost. You go to some prosperous farm and say to the owner: 'Open your barn!' Every grain in it is as clear as crystal. And every grain is sacred, needed for a sacred cause."

"Where are the keys of the village Soviet?"

"The chairman has them, I suppose."

"And where's the chairman?"

"He's still at the wedding feast."

Latugin, Baikov and Zaduviter climbed out of the cart and did not know what to do next. They watched the man they had questioned out of sight, reeling along the street as if the earth was alternately shooting up before him, and plunging into deep chasms. Then they seated themselves on the steps of the village Soviet to roll themselves cigarettes and have a smoke. A cold wind was driving the clouds across the sky and blowing into their faces. Stinging flakes came sifting down, and the ruts on the black road instantly filled with snow, making everything look still more desolate.

"When the Commissar talks, my hand reaches out for a sword," said Zaduviter, "but in reality it's just an ordinary village. Where are they, those enemies? Just listen to that music!"

In the distance, about ten houses away, could be seen a small crowd, probably consisting of those who had not been invited into the hut, or had simply failed to find room there. From within came the noise of stamping feet and the long-drawn sounds of an accordion being pulled out to the length of the tipsy player's arms.

"You're afraid of getting your feet wet, dear Comrade, but what we've got to do is dive right to the bottom," said Latugin. "The revolution demands greater depth—the Commissar told us that."

"Depth, depth! How deep are we to go? We turn everything upside down, but people have got to live just the same, to sow the corn, to bring children into the world. When is all that to be done?"

"The devil knows when—don't ask me."

Latugin—thoroughly irritated—chewed the end of a straw. Zaduviter, his forehead wrinkled, kept his mind fixed, in

the dogged, peasant way, not allowing himself to be interrupted or distracted, on the words spoken by the Commissar the day before. Baikov spoke up:

"We shan't get very far like this, lads. What about going to look for the chairman?"

He stood up, but Latugin said:

"You're not to go."

"What d'you mean? Why not?"

"I don't choose to tell you my reasons."

Then Zaduviter said firmly:

"If we go, we'll all go together. Let's go and find the chairman!"

"I'm not going."

"You must do what you're told."

"Come on, now, Latugin," said Baikov, his voice conciliatory. "We won't even go to the table, we won't touch a drop, we'll call the chairman into the entry."

They went to look for the chairman. Stepan Petrovich Nedoyeshkashi had held out for two days, but on the third day he began to think he was in danger of losing touch with the villagers. So he scraped the mud from his wooden leg, donned his best black trousers, gave a twist to the ends of his moustache, and made a solemn tour of the village.

"Here he is, thank God! Come in, Stepan Petrovich..."

Everywhere the hosts received him with embraces and hearty handshakes. There were cries of: "The place of honour for the chairman!" and he was made to sit in the corner under the icons. The matchmaker brought him gruel on a saucer, thickly sprinkled with salt, and demanded a ransom. He ransomed himself with a ruble—that was the most he would give—accepted a brimming glass of vodka and ate a bit of dried fish. But he was mistaken in thinking that the celebrations would be nearing their end by the third day. The real festivities, the dancing, the songs, the embraces, the heart-to-heart talks, the quarrels and the reconciliations, were only just beginning on the third day.

The toughness of these people! What hadn't they endured in the last few years! First mobilization under the tsar, towards the end of which men of fifty-four had been called up, so that there were only women left to plough the land—and while in the north a woman could manage a one-horse plough, the rich earth in these parts required a heavy

plough, drawn by two, and sometimes three pairs of oxen. The women still remembered that autumn. Many had died of the Spanish flu. The village had twice burned down. And hardly had the men returned from the world war, when mobilization was declared for Krasnov's army, accompanied by levies and the billeting of Cossacks on the villagers. The Cossacks, as is well known, are light-fingered. You may be ever so friendly with them, but only let one get into the saddle, and he will not be able to refrain—if he is a true Cossack—from sticking a stray pig with his lance.

But all this belonged to the past. Now the government was in their own hands, tax arrears had been cancelled, additional land assigned, and the people wanted to enjoy themselves without stint.

Stepan Petrovich stayed in each hut just as long as decency required, passing on to the next home where feasting was going on. Seated in the corner under the icons, he conversed soberly with the parents of the newlyweds, about the civil war, now raging north of the Don, around Voronezh and Kamishin, where Krasnov was pounding the Eighth and Ninth armies. "And so, dear father-in-law, dear mother-in-law, dear marriage brokers, we must keep awake, so as not to be caught napping! We must help the Soviet Power..." He spoke, too, of domestic affairs, of this and that, and his hosts were astonished that Stepan Petrovich should know so much about them—what lay in this one's barn and stood in that one's byre, and who had stuff hidden away.

It was getting harder and harder for him to drag himself from house to house on his wooden leg, salute the host afresh each time and take his seat. In one house he suddenly seized the saucer of gruel from the marriage broker's hand and ate it all up, though it was practically nothing but salt, then, extracting a handful of crumpled notes—all that he had left—from the pocket of his military greatcoat, he thrust it into the marriage broker's hand, gulped down a big glass of *samogon* and shouted to the bride, who had been dancing for three days in the stuffy heat, in the crush of a quadrille in which ten couples stood up:

"Stepanida, make it livelier!"

At that moment he was told that three Red Army men were asking for him. "Call them in!" "We did, but they won't come!"

Stepan Petrovich stood for a moment or two, supporting himself by his hands on the table, his head bent. Then he moved away and pushed his way among the guests to the entry, and saw that there really were three grave-looking men standing there.

"Who are you?" he asked, his voice quite steady.

"Food detachment."

Latugin answered threateningly, expecting that the chairman would at least be taken aback. But Stepan Petrovich, who emanated such a strong and pleasing smell of spirits that Baikov moved closer to him, was not a bit taken aback.

"You've come just at the right moment! I've been waiting for you ever so long. Hi, there!" he shouted towards the half-open door, from behind which came a confused noise of shouting, the clatter of dishes and the stamping of the dancers. "Stop that music for a while!" By now he was swaying so violently that Baikov had to take him in tow. "Comrades!" he continued, "you've come to the Spasskoye village Soviet, you know." Grasping the doorjamb to steady himself, he called into the room, his voice more peremptory than ever: "Citizens—to the meeting—all of you!"

He went out into the yard, where three elderly peasants, leaning against an unharnessed cart, were singing a Cossack song in different keys; two others, their arms entwined, were engaged in altercation, and yet another was going round and round in an unsuccessful effort to find the open gate and go home. Here, too, and outside the gates, where dancing was going on to the strains of an accordion, Stepan Petrovich reiterated the command that all were to go to the village Soviet without delay.

Puncturing the frozen ground furiously with his wooden leg as he ran, he called out without stopping:

"A holiday's a holiday, but business is business.... The lists are ready, the stocks have been calculated... Send a telegram to Tsaritsyn: grain delivered in full—"

When Baikov and Zaduiviter attempted to persuade him at least to put off the meeting till the next day, to give the villagers time to sober down, he only said: "A man who is wise when he's drunk is doubly wise. Don't try to teach me. Tomorrow won't do nearly as well. There are a few people here who must not be given time to think things over."

While people were gathering outside the village Soviet, Stepan Petrovich laid all his books and lists before the comrades from the food detachment, commenting upon them the while in an eager whisper:

"There are three kulak farms: one is Krivosuchka's, he's a bandit, robbed the mails in 1907, killing the postman and keeping the money hidden for ten years till everything blew over, and then built himself a stone barn and a shop, and made money in the war, supplying hides to the army. In Spasskoye alone he slaughtered more than half the cattle. Now he's trying to get up a co-operative society to hand his shop over to. I shall soon know all about his tricks. He says he's consumptive, and sees lights at night. He's a dangerous man. Another kulak farm is the one belonging to Milovidov—he used to be a mine contractor, but he came back to the village before the war, and started a tavern and pawnshop on the sly... he's a spider, a usurer, a real beast, he's picked the bones of the whole village. We discovered that he was the one who sent a man here who pretended to be tsar Nikolai II.... The third farm is Mikitenko's—the family have been cattle dealers for ever so far back. He used to have his own barges on the Don. Besides these farms you can count in another ten or so belonging to their relations, close friends, connections by marriage.... Then there are some cautious muzhiks, who say: 'Who knows how all this is going to end, or who will be in power in the long run! Wisest not to quarrel with anyone.' Those all belong to the enemy front.... And these here... are all on our side." Stepan Petrovich drew his thick forefinger down the list. "The situation in the village is critical—either they kill me, or I shall be able to clip some people's wings...."

The villagers, some drunk, some sober, were crowding round the village Soviet, pushing and swaying. A hum of talk arose from their midst. Looking out of the window, Baikov repeated in undertones a sailor's ditty:

*When sea gulls haunt the sandy shore
Seafaring men have grief in store.
For till they're back at sea again
There will be storm and hurricane.*

Aloud he said to his comrades: "Come on out to the porch, or there'll be trouble!"

The neighbour's little girl, freckled, blue-eyed, knowing, rushed into Anna Trekhzhilnaya's hut, and gasped out all in one breath:

"My, my, you should see what's going on at the village Soviet, the muzhiks have begun pulling the palings out of the fences...."

With a single glance of her unblinking eyes she took it all in: that Anna had on elastic-sided boots and white stockings and the puce-coloured dress she had only worn once while her husband was alive; and that she was sitting on the edge of the bed with her head uncovered, and the unfrocked priest was lying on the bed with his knees drawn up, and Anna had given him a clean shirt again, with black dots, and he was holding Anna's hand....

"Who told you to rush into people's houses like that!" shouted the embarrassed Anna, and the child rushed out of the hut, too frightened to say another word. But she had waked Kuzma Kuzmich. The last few days had been exhausting for him—he had eaten and drunk a lot, and talked still more. The peasants had not missed a single word of his sermon; there had been a few unintelligible passages, but they only made it more impressive. Wherever he went, he had had to discuss first and foremost the subject which touched them most nearly: justice. When none but the elderly and the venerable remained at the table, somebody, his tongue loosened by drink, brushing away bones and scraps with his sleeve, would be sure to begin.

"Kuzma Kuzmich, you've hurt our feelings.... What d'you mean by saying there isn't any justice? Then the world's a wilderness!"

Another would interrupt him:

"Our young people, now—" and he nodded towards the other end of the room, where skirts and plaits and ribbons and flushed faces whirled round and round. "There's no doing anything with them. 'We can do what we like, now,' they say. 'There's no God, there's no tsar, our fathers and mothers are fools, and everything's splendid....' There's nothing to bind them now. What is there for people to hold on to? And then you come and tell us there is no such thing as justice!"

Yet another, a greybeard, would join in the conversation;

"If it comes from man, then the strongest will be on top, and his word will be law. And we shall all be like clipped bushes again. . . ."

"Are you strong?" Kuzma Kuzmich asked him.

"I'm strong . . . but the ruble is stronger than me, I've been beaten by the ruble all my life."

"And did you ever complain to anyone?"

"Who was there for me to complain to?"

"Did you go on pilgrimage to the holy relics in the Kiev-Pechersk Monastery?"

"No, I never did that."

"So there isn't any justice."

"Who says there isn't? I was boiling with rage. I brought my rifle back from the war, and I stood on the boundary line and called out: 'You thought I was killed, did you? You give me my eight acres!'"

"And did they?"

"Of course they did!"

"So there is justice?"

"That isn't justice—frightening people with a rifle! No, brother, I wrong nobody, and let nobody try to wrong me. But look at old Akim—all by himself—can't work any more . . . he has to sit in other people's chimney corners, and eat the bitter bread of charity. What good has all his work done him? He had his little hut, but Milovidov took it in payment for debt. . . . And what good will my work do me? I've done enough work in my fifty years to build myself four stone houses, and I'm out at elbows. . . . All my labour and toil fly away from me like pigeons . . . they come to roost on someone else's roof, not on mine. That was good when you said: 'Justice is you yourself, valiant soul!' I'm not afraid of death, Kuzma Kuzmich, and I can still carry fifteen bushels on my back, but I can't get justice. This would be justice: to consider men not according to the amount of rubles they have, but according to the work they've done. . . . How could that be achieved? If the Soviet government could do that, we should really be grateful. . . ."

"But that's just what the law of the Soviet government is, you funny chap!"

"Well, it hasn't reached us yet!"

It vexed Kuzma Kuzmich that for all his shrewdness he had no answer ready for a man like this. It was much easier

to speak to intellectuals than to peasants. In all these talks round the table he caught a note of satisfaction mingled with dissatisfaction, resentment and expectation. It was as if these people vaguely expected some radical change from the revolution, and would have liked to urge it onward.

By the end of the second day he had dragged himself back to Anna's hut in a pitiful state. Sinking to the floor beside the bench, he slapped his cheeks, and buried his face in his hands, laughing and saying over and over again: "I'm getting weak, Anna, I'm getting old, Anna."

Without a word, Anna led him to the bathhouse at the edge of the pond. She soaped him with her own hands, and let the bathhouse fill with steam. It was only Kuzma Kuzmich's face that was old, his body was smooth and white, and tenderness welled up in Anna when he leaped on the shelf like a fish, exclaiming: "Fan me with the twigs—there's a good soul!"

The bath soothed him, and he slept, breathing quietly, late into the morning. Then he woke up, had a drink of milk, and, saying: "Don't be angry with me, Anna, I seem to have a headache," went to sleep again. But when the neighbour's little girl rushed in and woke him he was his old cheerful self once more.

"What did the little girl want?"

"She says there's a meeting—some Red Army men have come for grain, and there's a row!"

"Good heavens! It's our chaps!"

Kuzma Kuzmich hurried into his clothes, while Anna looked at him in silence from beneath her brows. The door was again jerked open, and the same little girl appeared, this time only poking her head in.

"Everybody's fighting—such a lot of people hurt! Vlasikha has taken her husband home all over blood. . . . She's shouting all down the street, and cursing you. . . . Mitrofan Kri-vosuchka started harnessing his horse, but they wouldn't let him—they dragged him through the gate and gave him such a beating—oh my!"

She disappeared again. Kuzma Kuzmich strode towards the door after her, but Anna cried out fiercely: "I won't let you go!"

She stood at the stove, tall, lean, her masculine-looking shoulders raised, her head thrown back, as if resisting an attack.

Kuzma Kuzmich gave her hand a hard squeeze:

"None of that nonsense, Anna! Or I'll take the poker! Calm yourself! I'll be back in a minute. . . . I'll bring my comrades back for dinner. Make us some pancakes, do you hear! Stop it, I tell you!"

Anna brought out through her clenched teeth:

"Very well, Father."

The neighbour's little girl longed for everything to be a great deal more terrible than what she saw on her way to the village Soviet and back as she carried the news from house to house. But the meeting was noisy enough as it was. The question of delivering grain did not create much discussion—"If it's wanted, it's wanted," they said. The list of contributions required from each farm was listened to in silence, and a repetition was asked for. Brief snatches of talk began to be exchanged in the crowd, and there was a certain amount of movement as some moved closer to the porch and others to the left, in the direction of a neighbouring vegetable garden, surrounded by a wattle fence.

Everyone recognized the imperious voice of Mikitenko, shouting: "It's not right!" "It is! It is!" many voices answered him. A bearded fellow with one of his sleeves torn off, cast his cap on the ground between his feet and began pouring out old grievances.

"What has all my work brought me? Who do they think I am? Must I beg him for a crust of bread? Is that your Soviet Power?"

He was pushed aside by another, who, pale with rage, started uttering words still more terrible. Then a section of the crowd which had been standing at a little distance, rushed to the fence, tore out the stakes, and attacked the meeting from the rear. Latugin, Zaduviter and Baikov dashed out of the porch, into the crowd, scattering the men and snatching the stakes out of their hands, shouting: "No panic! Everything is in order! Damn your eyes! The meeting continues. . . ."

The tussle was brief, for there were not so very many attackers. Some made off, and a few were pursued into the street. A certain number remained lying on the ground, which was lightly powdered with snow. . . .

Kuzma Kuzmich took a short cut by stiles leading over fences and between vegetable patches, but lost his way and

found himself in a yard he did not know. Several women were standing about, one complaining bitterly, the rest listening to her attentively. When they caught sight of Kuzma Kuzmich, they all began talking at once, and Varvara Vlasova, the mother of Nadezhda, approached Kuzma Kuzmich, turning up the long sleeves of her canvas jacket menacingly. The others moved after her.

"So that's why you didn't take money from us, unfrocked priest!" said Varvara. "And we fools trusted him . . . he let the whole village get drunk . . . spied into all our affairs . . . addled everybody's brains, the mischief-maker. . . . Selling us all to the Communists. . . . Don't stand gaping at him, you blockheads, beat him to death. . . ."

"You mustn't beat me," replied Kuzma Kuzmich, retreating. "You'll rue it, wenches! Don't lay a finger on me!"

"And did you spare *us*?"

The women, now thoroughly roused, tore the kerchiefs from their heads and began shouting all together, blaming the unfrocked priest for the harsh assessments, the row at the village Soviet, and the innumerable geese and sucking pigs that had been devoured during the last few days—it was all his fault. They forced him up against the fence, and all his efforts to bring them once more beneath his spell, his forced smiles, and conciliatory murmurs ("Well, you've worked yourselves up, now let's be friends again . . . let's talk it over quietly") were unavailing. Varvara Vlasova led the attack by pulling his hair at the sides of his head, and the others drummed on his bent back with their fists. He decided that the best he could do for himself was to lie down and shield himself with his arms. His very ribs seemed to be cracking. Just as he was saying to himself: "So long as they don't get hold of anything to hit me with!" he heard a savage voice exclaim: "Hit him with a stake, the werewolf!"

He tried to spring up, but was prevented by dizziness. And then he was suddenly released. He could hear himself groaning, and suppressed his groans with an effort. Somebody lifted him and propped him against the fence. Kuzma Kuzmich rubbed the snow and chaff out of his eyes and saw Anna, with the freckled face of the neighbour's little girl peeping out delightedly from behind her skirts; and then he saw Latugin, Zaduiviter, and Baikov.

"You all right?" asked Latugin. "A glass of *samogon* for him—at once—bring it, somebody! Well, Kuzma, you've done a good job! A vote of thanks for your antireligious propaganda was passed at the meeting."

"You can't imagine, Dasha, what a drab, dull chap I was all this time, I mean ever since we parted in Petrograd. . . . Don't interrupt—I *was*! There's a subconscious life in us all. It's like a disease that keeps you down, so that you seem to be smouldering over a low fire. . . . There's a very simple explanation, of course—you didn't love me any more, and I. . . ."

Dasha turned her head swiftly towards him, and in her moist, grey eyes, which still inspired him with a certain awe, he read that he had been mistaken. She had not stopped loving him. This glance struck Ivan Ilyich dumb for a moment, and his lips widened in a smile which was exceedingly joyous, even if it was not very intelligent. Dasha went on packing into a small basket all the various objects that Ivan Ilyich in the course of visiting half a dozen different departments that morning, had received by way of material rations.

The rations included necessary and useful things—stockings, a few lengths of stuff from which a dress could be made, some exquisite batiste underclothes just the right size for a teen-aged girl, and Dasha was so frail and thin, she could easily have passed for a schoolgirl. There were boots, too, and Ivan Ilyich was as proud of this acquisition as if he had captured an enemy battery. But there were other things about which they could not help wondering whether they would be any use in the campaigning life before them. These had been issued to Telegin instead of the sheets he had counted on receiving at one of the depots—a china kitten and puppy, some leather hair-curlers, a set of picture post cards of the Crimea, and a pair of whalebone stays of the very best material, but so enormous that Dasha could wrap them twice round her. . . .

"Dashenka, I've been thinking of our farewell at the station. . . . You said something like: 'Good-bye for ever!' to me. Perhaps I didn't hear you properly, I was awfully de-

pressed myself. . . . You were so frail and wan, and remote and unloving. . . ."

"How horrid!" said Dasha, without turning round. She was wrapping the kitten in a thick stocking, so that it should not break on the way. She did not usually pay much attention to things, but these, the sweet kitten, and the sleeping puppy with the big ears, somehow appealed to her. They seemed to have come to her of their own accord, as if to create a tiny world of innocent smiles for Dasha, in this vast, dire life of devastation, over which hung the menacing clouds of ideas and passions. . . . "At all events that was the image of you I took away from Petrograd. . . . Took it away, and lived with it. . . . You were as much a part of me as my own heart. . . . I made up my mind to live a solitary, bachelor life. . . ."

He tried to move about the room in such a way as to keep Dasha the centre of his movements all the time. She had taken off her kerchief, and her wavy, ash-blonde hair was caught up on the nape of her neck in a red satin ribbon—issued by the depot of the artillery command. She was bending over the basket, which stood on a stool, every now and then straightening up, her hands on her hips, to think. She wore her white nurse's robe, more becoming than the most elaborate dress, and she had tied it in smartly at the waist—neither this, nor the red ribbon were mere chance effects.

"Isn't it strange, Dasha, danger and death used to be perfectly indifferent matters—one would either be killed or one wouldn't. In war that doesn't in the least mean one's brave—it's sheer fatalism. But now when I look back I feel terrified. . . . I want to live a thousand years, just to be able to touch you, to look at you, as I am doing now. . . ."

"A nice sight I'd be in a thousand years. . . . What on earth am I to do with this, Ivan?" She unrolled the corset again and held it against herself. "There's room in it for three women. Perhaps I shouldn't take it, after all?"

"And supposing you get fat—it would come in useful then."

"Don't be silly—you know I never wear stays. I'll tell you what—if I took out the bones and unripped it it might make an awfully nice waistcoat for you."

Taking advantage of the fact that both her hands were

occupied, Ivan Ilyich stole up from behind and drew Dasha tenderly towards him.

"It's true then? Say it is. . . ."

"Of course it's true! You're the one man in the world for me, without you, I'm nothing. . . . I set out in quest of you. . . . Ivan, do think sometimes!" She freed her shoulders and drew away from him. "You must remember how strong you are—you'll crush me to pieces one day. . . . Wait a minute—have we forgotten anything? It's too late to do anything about it, anyhow. . . ."

"What do you want—I'll fly and get it!"

"It would be nice to have a sponge."

"A sponge!"

Ivan Ilyich rushed over to his greatcoat and extracted from one of its pockets a sponge and a few perfectly unnecessary objects.

"Look at this, Dasha, nobody could explain what it was for, but I took it just the same."

"Ivan, that's a lovely thing, it's a rubber roller for massaging the face—you're a darling, it's exactly what I wanted!"

When she had finished packing the basket, Dasha went over to Ivan Ilyich, who was sitting on the edge of the cot, ready at any minute to spring up. She lifted his face in her hands and said, gazing steadily into his eyes:

"I've taken a vow. I'm not going to make myself wait for anything in my new life—I'm not a Solveig,* and I don't intend to try and penetrate the sea mists any more. There shall be nothing but love and action. . . . Take me as I am. For better or for worse, your faithful wife. We'll begin all over again. . . ."

Here the doctor entered, as usual without knocking, bringing the latest newspaper and thundering out the latest tidings from the front:

"Admiral Kolchak, the man who broke up the Directorate at Omsk and slaughtered the workers wholesale, has been declared neither more nor less than the supreme ruler of the whole of Russia! Both the French and the English have recognized his power. . . . What d'you say to that? He has an army running into six hundred thousand—the Far East, if you

* *Solveig*—a character from Ibsen's poetical drama *Peer Gynt*.

please, he is obligingly leaving to the Japanese! And now listen to this—a combined English and French fleet has appeared in the roads at Sevastopol and Novorossiisk. . . . Allies! Look who we were fools enough to win the war for with our own blood!" The doctor thrust out his lips ferociously. "Intervention, shameless, open intervention! Don't look at me so fiercely, Darya Dmitrevna. . . . Bring your good man and come and have borshch at my place. . . . Remember that fellow we had with bayonet wounds? He's sent a sack of cabbage, goose and pork. . . . Too bad, Ivan Ilyich, you carrying off my best nurse right under my nose. . . . But today you and I will drink vodka, and to hell with all interventionists. . . ."

* XI *

It needed very little to bring the vacillations of Vadim Petrovich to an end—and that little was supplied when he stumbled upon the tracks of Katya. It is thus that the print of a woman's bare foot on the seashore sets a man weaving a whole romance in his head around the beauteous being who has passed to the sound of the ocean waves. His jealous, tormenting passion surged over him again, dispelling his despairing thoughts and weak-willed misery, and everything now appeared to him simple and obvious.

That very night (after his talk with the German), he left Ekaterinoslav. Leaving his suitcase in the hotel, he took nothing but a change of linen and his kitbag. In the train he removed his officer's shoulder straps and cockade, tore the insignia off his left sleeve, and threw them all out of the window. And with these gewgaws flew away all that, up to the night at the "Bi-Ba-Bo," had seemed so essential to his self-respect. His legs thrust wide apart, his hands stuck in his belt, he sat on the side of the bunk in the dark, almost empty carriage, and a wild joy welled up in him. This was freedom! The train was speeding him towards Katya. Whatever had happened to her, he would make his way to her, even if he got torn to pieces in the process.

The stationmaster at Ekaterinoslav had given warning that halfway to Rostov the bandits were again on the rampage, and that this would be the last east-bound train, adding that

there was no knowing whether it would take the lower branch via Gulyai-Polye, or the upper one, via Yuzovka. At the station itself the guard had told the passengers, who came crowding round him, about the bandits—how they dashed over the steppe in carts and *britchkas*, in search of booty, setting fire to estates where the proprietors had been foolish enough to remain, audaciously attacking military stores and distilleries, and hovering on the outskirts of towns.

"The atamans wouldn't be so dangerous if they had no leader," the guard said in his deep voice. "But they have—an ataman over all the others—Makhno. He's very popular. He has a state of his own, and a capital—Gulyai-Polye. He doesn't waste his time on trifles. He lets trains pass—after having a look at them, of course, and taking someone or other off, to deal with on the spot, right on the track. The last journey I made, just as we drew in to the platform, there was Makhno standing under the bell, smoking a cigar. I jumped off, went up to him, and saluted. 'Put your hand down,' he says harshly, 'I'm not God or the tsar.... Any Communists on board?' 'No, Sir,' says I. 'Any White Guards?' 'No, Sir, nothing but local people.' 'Any money?' My heart beat so, I thought it would burst. 'Come with me,' I says, 'and see for yourself. The luggage van and the mail van are quite empty.' 'All right, then, flag the engine driver.'"

The stops at wayside halts were nerve-racking—the wheels fallen silent, the immobility, the torturing suspense. Vadim Petrovich went to the end of the train and stood on the top step: there was not a soul on the dark station platform, or on the rails. Nothing was to be seen but the faint yellow light coming from a wick floating in oil, behind the station window, and two seated figures—the guard from the train and the telegraph operator—resigned to sitting there all night, their faces muffled up to the noses in their coat collars. No use going and asking them anything—the train would start when the signal came from the next station, and who could tell if there was anyone alive there?

Vadim Petrovich would take a gulp of cold air, his body taut, all the muscles tense. In the windy November gloom, in the whole of the boundless wilderness of Russia, there was only one vital spot—a bundle of warm flesh, ardently beloved by him.... What moment of madness could have

driven him, merely out of the frantic desire to revenge and punish, to fling off Katya's hands when they had clutched at him in her final desperation, to abandon her so cruelly, alone, in a strange town? And even if he found her, and threw himself without a word (no other way was possible) on the ground before her to kiss her feet, in stockings which had no doubt been darned till there was nothing left to darn—how could he be sure of receiving pardon? Treachery such as his is not lightly forgiven.

While Vadim Petrovich was thus meditating alone on the step at the end of the train, muttering and frowning, the guard came out of the office and stood next to the train, perfectly indifferent to all problems connected with the overcoming of space. Vadim Petrovich asked him if they would be waiting a long time. The guard did not so much as shrug his shoulders. The smoky lantern in his hand swayed in the wind, lighting up the fluttering hem of his black coat. The dim light in the window of the office suddenly went out, and a door banged. The telegraph operator came up to the guard, and they both gazed long and fixedly towards the signal.

"Put it out!" whispered the telegraph operator.

The guard lifted the lantern to his bewhiskered, puffy face and blew on the smoking flame, and they both clambered on to the train and opened the door on the other side.

"Go!" said the guard to Roshchin, hastily descending the steps himself, and setting off at a run.

Roshchin jumped down after them. Stumbling over the rails and running into a pile of sleepers, he made his way to a field, where the darkness was not quite so dense, and made out two figures moving in front of him. He caught them up.

"There's some pits here," said the telegraph operator. "Curse this darkness! They've been quarried for sand—I always hide there. . . ."

The pits turned out to be a little to the left. Roshchin clambered into a sort of ditch after his companions. They were immediately joined by two others—the engine driver and the stoker let themselves down into the hollow, swearing. The guard heaved a deep sigh.

"I shall leave this service. It's sickening. Call this traffic?"

"Sh!" said the telegraph operator. "Here they come, the devils!"

Now the sound of horses' hoofs could be heard in the steppe, and the thud of wheels became audible.

"Who is it that makes trouble in these parts?" the guard enquired of the telegraph operator. "The Jockey of Death again?"

"No, he's in the Dibrivsk forest. Perhaps it's Marusya roving about. Although it can't be her, either—she always rides with torches.... It must be some petty local ataman...."

"Oh, no!" said the engine driver huskily. "It's that bloody Maksyuta, he's one of Makhno's atamans."

And he sighed.

"I've got a Yid in the third coach, with a whole lot of suitcases—I didn't warn him... too bad!"

The sound of hoofs drew nearer, like the wind before a storm. The cart wheels were already thundering over the cobblestones outside the station. There were cries of: "Come on! Come on!", the sound of breaking glass, shots, a brief shriek, blows upon iron.... The guard started blowing on his cradled hands.

"Of course they had to break the glass in the carriage windows—the drunken sots!"

The noise and bustle did not last long.

A harrowing voice cried: "To horse!" Carts clattered, horses snorted, wheels rumbled, and the ataman band rode off into the steppe. The five men clambered out of the pit and returned slowly to the dark train, each to his place: the telegraph operator set light to the only wick and got into touch with the next station, the engine driver and stoker examined the engine to see whether the bandits had taken away any important part, Roshchin got back into his carriage, and the guard, crunching underfoot the broken glass from the windows, muttered:

"Just as I expected—killed the poor devil... why couldn't they just have taken his bags? Why do they have to do a man in?"

After another prolonged delay the guard at last gave a short whistle, the engine wailed indignantly in the empty steppe, and the train started in the direction of Gulyai-Polye.

Vadim Petrovich, his elbows on the folding table beneath the window, his face buried in the palms of his hands,

concentrated with all his might on the problem: Katya had left Rostov the very day after that blackguard Onoli had told her of his death. This meant that her meeting with the Landsturmer in the train had taken place two days later. . . . Roshchin was ready to concede that the little German had tried to console her without the slightest idea of a future reward . . . that she was at the time in dire need of consolation. But to enter her name and address so accurately in a stranger's notebook, not even forgetting to put a comma in the proper place, the very day after losing her nearest and dearest—that was a mystery! After all, her whole world had tumbled around her in ruins! The body of her beloved husband was lying somewhere like carrion. . . . Surely it would have been only natural if she had fallen into hopeless despair for a few days! She had given her address *poste restante*; it appeared. So she must have had a gleam of hope somewhere. . . . What a mystery!

"Your papers, please, citizen," said the guard, sitting down opposite Roshchin and setting his smoky lantern beside him. "We'll soon be in Gulyai-Polye, then you can sleep in peace."

"That's where I'm getting out."

"All the better. . . . I shall be asked who I had on the train."

"I haven't got any papers."

"No papers?"

"I tore them up and threw them away."

"In that case I shall have to report you."

"Report me then and go the devil."

"Why speak of the devil at such a moment? Are you an officer?"

Roshchin, whose brain was very much on the alert, answered tensely, through clenched teeth:

"I'm an anarchist."

"Aha, so that's it! I've carried plenty of your sort from Ekaterinoslav." The guard picked up his lantern and let it dangle between his legs as he gazed long through the window at sparks from the engine flying past. "You're an educated man," he brought out at last in a low voice. "Tell us what we ought to do. . . . I talked to an anarchist on the last run, too—very glum, he was—grey-haired and unkempt. 'We don't need your railways,' he said. 'We shall break up

everything, so that people will forget it all. Railways lead to slavery and capitalism. We shall divide everything equally, a man ought to live in freedom, like an animal, without any authority over him. . . .’ Much obliged! By working on trains thirty years, I got a cottage in Taganrog for me and my old woman; we have a goat and a vegetable patch with a couple of plum trees on it. And that’s my whole capital. What do I want freedom for? To be able to let my goat graze on the hillside? Tell me this: was there order under the old regime? There was exploitation, of course, I’m not denying that. Take a first-class carriage, now—everything quiet and decent, one passenger smoking a cigar, another dozing in a gentlemanly manner. You knew they were exploiters, but there was never any outright abuse, God forbid! You just touched your cap and went quietly through the train. Of course in the third class the muzhiks were all huddled up together, and you didn’t have to stand on ceremony. . . . That’s the way things were—no getting away from it. But you always had a bit of roast chicken, and some ham and a couple of eggs, and as for bread—remember those rolls?” He paused, still staring out at the flying sparks. “An axle has got overheated in the luggage van. Nothing to oil them with, transport will come to an end without the help of the anarchists. Now you tell me—what’s going to happen? We changed the tsar for the Rada, the Rada for the hetman, and who are we going to change the hetman for? For Makhno? There was once a fool who set out to make himself a ploughshare. He kept the iron on the fire till half of it melted away, so he decided to make an axe. But half of the iron that was left melted, too, and now only enough remained to make an awl. And he banged it with his hammer until there was nothing left but a splinter. Heigh-ho! There’s no order, no respect, no master! You’re going to Gulyai-Polye—you’ll see how people live under the ‘free anarchist regime.’ I can tell you this—they have a high old time: I never saw such goings-on in all my born days! The whole district has been declared a ‘vintage territory.’ The wenches I’ve taken there! Yes, yes . . . you must excuse an old man, Comrade Anarchist—but I tell you: Russia is ruined. . . .”

A number of prosperous peasants who had joined ataman detachments in the summer were now beginning to think of going home. Loading on to carts all the booty that had

honestly fallen to their lot after successful raids, and changing all sorts of local currency into tsarist rubles, they fixed a tarpaulin securely over all their goods, hung a kettle from the back axle, and furtively harnessed their sturdy horses to set off for the hamlets and villages in which there were no more Germans billeted. Others went openly to their Ataman and took a brief farewell:

"Don't count on me as a soldier any more."

"What's the matter?"

"I'm homesick. Can't eat or drink or sleep. When you need me again, send for me. I'll come."

The thoughts of Alexei Krasilnikov ran in that direction, too. He consulted Matryona, his brother's wife, he even consulted Katya Roshchin, asking them if they considered it was too early to go home yet. Perhaps unpleasantness awaited them there. There was no stealing into Vladimirskoye unnoticed, and they might be made answerable for the murder of the German corporal. The Germans were not to be trifled with. On the other hand, if they found a devastated site on their return, and everything destroyed by fire, they would have to rebuild the house, and restore the yard to usefulness. All this must be done at once, this autumn.

Five good horses and three carts of odds and ends, lengths of material and all sorts of household objects comprised the share of Alexei Krasilnikov in the loot gathered by Makhno's army. Most of this had been collected, not by Alexei Krasilnikov, but by Matryona. Smartly attired, handsome, sharp-tongued, Matryona had fearlessly attended the meetings at which the ataman of the detachment, or Makhno himself, had divided the booty, and had taken what she wanted. If any peasant was bold enough to contend with her, a roar of laughter broke out as she tore the coveted object from his hands—some shawl or greatcoat, or a length of good cloth. "I'm a woman, I need it more than you do! You'll just sell it for drink, you bandit, you'll bring it back to me tonight, see if you don't...." She would barter and purchase, keeping a barrel of spirits on her cart for that purpose.

Alexei racked his brains and could come to no decision, until the joyful tidings came that Skoropadsky, abandoned by the Germans and by his own troops, had renounced the hetmanship, and that Petlura's men had entered Kiev and

declared a Democratic Ukrainian Republic there. The Ukrainian Red Army had advanced from the Soviet border simultaneously. This was indeed good news.

Secretly, in the dead of night, Alexei drove his horses out of the steppe, woke up Matryona and Katya, and told them to get breakfast ready while he harnessed the horses. They had a hearty meal to sustain them on their long journey and started over the rough road in a thick mist, before daybreak on their way home, to the village of Vladimirskeye.

It would have been hard to recognize in Katya Roshchin, seated in the cart in a sheepskin jacket and greased top boots, her cheeks as firm and rosy as apples, the fine lady, ready to shrink and curl up like a frightened ladybird at the least of life's vicissitudes. Reclining on the hay, she whipped up the horse so as not to fall too far behind the front cart, driven by Alexei, who every now and then allowed his spirited black team to break into a gallop. The last cart was driven by Matryona, who trusted it to no one else, either on foot or horse.

The steppe was deserted. There were white streaks in the crevices of the ravines—snow carried by the wind from chalky plateaus. Here and there on the horizon could be seen russet-coloured pyramids of earth on the edges of mines. Life had not begun again yet in the regions deserted by the armies of occupation. Great numbers of the inhabitants had gone from mines and factories into the Red detachments and were now fighting at Tsaritsyn. Others had fled to the north, where Ukrainian Red Army battalions were being formed on the Soviet frontiers. The roads were choked with dock leaves, and weeds had sprung up on the neglected cornfields, the yellowing ribs of horses showing here and there among them. Very few houses were to be seen here. Matryona continually warned her brother-in-law to keep as far as possible from people. ("Nothing good was to be expected from them.") But Alexei only laughed, and called her a vixen. "You used to be as sweet as honey," he said, "and now look at you—you've become a regular wild beast, my dear Matryona. . . ."

Katya had plenty of time for meditation, as she bobbed up and down on the cart, sucking at a straw. She thoroughly understood that she was being taken to the village of Vladimirskeye as a trophy—intended for Alexei Ivanovich, and no

doubt regarded as the most precious of all the booty on the three carts. What was she but a captive from the ruins of the old world? Alexei Ivanovich would build a fine house on the ashes of the one burned down, fencing it against the outside world with strong palings, and hiding all his treasures underground. And then he would say firmly: "Ekaterina Dmitrevna, there's only one thing left. It's for you to decide."

Life seemed to her like a town which had been put to fire and sword—a mere heap of ashes with scorched chimneys protruding from them. All who had been near and dear to her were either dead or missing.

Matryona had recently had a letter from Semyon, her husband, who was in Samara, in which he had said, among other things, that he had gone to the address given, on former Dvoryanskaya Street, and that there was no Dr. Bula-
vin living there, and nobody knew where he and his daughter had gone. Katya was like a stray kitten whom there were only two people left to love and care for—Alexei and Matryona. How was she to refuse them anything they asked?

It seemed to her that the years she had gone through had been as long and eventful as centuries, and that by now she ought to be an old woman with eyes dim with weeping. But the chill winds had only brought colour into her cheeks, and beneath the sheepskin coat was a youthful warmth. This sensation of unfading youth was almost annoying. Was not her soul old? Or was this, also, an illusion?

Matryona, in conversation with Katya, never tired of assuring her that God had bound up their fates, and that God alone could put them asunder. Alexei never imposed such talk upon her, but there had been several occasions when he had saved Katya from disaster at great personal risk, acting as a man acts on behalf of a woman he has marked down for himself. Katya would not have known how to refuse him, she could not have found words to justify such ingratitude. But she hoped that all this would be postponed for as long as possible. There was something attractive about Alexei Ivanovich, whose coarse, straightforward face seemed always to be reflecting the sun's rays. He was strong and imperturbable, with a straight back, a broad chest, and a thick mop of hair. Bold and clear-headed in the hour of danger, his attitude to Katya was benevolent and affection-

ately teasing. But the thought that the day would come when she would have to be his, made Katya close her eyes and shrink into herself, as if desiring to wriggle deep into the hay on the cart.

One day they left the road to have their meal on the bank of a brook, which flowed just at this place into a small creek, with trampled reeds and the piles of a wrecked watermill sticking out of it. Matryona had gone to collect firewood, and Katya to wash the cooking pot in the river. A little later Alexei arrived. Throwing his cap and mitts on the grass, he squatted down at the water's edge beside Katya, and splashed water over his face, afterwards drying it on the edge of his jacket.

"You'll get your hands cold," he said.

Katya placed the pot on the grass and rose to her knees. Her hands felt frozen to the bone, and she shook the drops of water from them and began, like Alexei, drying them on her sheepskin.

"I suppose people used to kiss your hands in the old times," he said tensely, his voice harsh and defiant.

She shot a clear glance at him as if to ask what was the matter with him. Katya had never realized the power of her beauty, though she had considered herself, in the simplicity of her heart, a pretty woman, sometimes a very pretty woman, and had always been fond of admiration, like a bird preening its feathers in the first rosy rays of the sun lighting up the silvery dew between the tree trunks. But she was not aware of the beauty which was now making Alexei Ivanovich avert his hot, gleaming eyes.

"Grease your hands, I tell you—there's a bottle of sunflower oil in my cart—you'll get them chapped."

The usual teasing smile had returned to his ripe lips beneath the crisp moustache. Katya drew a sigh of relief, though she had not quite realized how nearly that which she did not desire had come about. Either the drowsiness from lying on the hay in the jolting cart, or the all-embracing peace of the steppe must have had its effect on Alexei, for after Matryona had gone to gather firewood, he could not keep his eyes off Katya as she bent down at the water's edge. And he had followed her like a village boy who has heard the sound of linen being thumped by the neighbours' Proska, stooping from the planks of the waterside, her skirt

tucked up, her calves tantalizingly white; the boy furtively threads his way through dock leaves and nettles, eagerly inhaling the air, which has suddenly become intoxicating. It was not that Alexei Ivanovich had taken fright—it would have been no easy task to frighten him. It was simply that Katya, with a single glance from her serene, beautiful eyes, managed to convey: "This is not nice, this won't do."

He had kept a hold on himself in more trying moments than this, but just the same his hands trembled as if he had been endeavouring to lift a millstone. He picked up the cooking pot from the grass.

"Come on, let's start making the gruel," he said, and they went back to the carts. "Ekaterina Dmitrevna, you've been married twice, why haven't you any children?"

"It was the times, Alexei Ivanovich. My first husband didn't want any, and I was foolish."

"And didn't the late Vadim Petrovich want any either?"

Katya knitted her brows and turned away in silence.

"I've been meaning to ask you for a long time . . . you've had lots of experience. . . . How did they set about this sweet business? Did your husbands—your young men—kiss your hands? Or did it all begin in beating about the bush? Was that the way? How do the gentry do it?"

They had reached the carts. Alexei threw some harness which was lying on one of the carts with all his might on the ground, took the shaft bow from under the cart, propped one of the shafts against it and tied the cooking pot to the end of the shaft.

"You come from the upper classes, and I come from a peasant home . . . and we met one another in a narrow path. There's no way back for you—that's all over. What we haven't yet worked out, we'll work out to the end very soon. . . . There's nothing for you to do but find a new master. . . ."

"Alexei Ivanovich, have I offended you?"

"No. . . . It's I who wants to offend you, but I can't find the words. . . . I'm a peasant, a fool. . . . Oh what a fool I am, blast it! I see, I see! All you want is to sheer off and get abroad—that's the only place for you. . . ."

"For shame, Alexei Ivanovich! What have I done for you to make such an accusation? I owe you my life, and I shall never forget it. . . ."

"You will. . . . You've seen how Matryona's begun to distrust people? I don't trust people either. I've been bathing in blood ever since 1914. People have become wild beasts nowadays. Perhaps they were before, but we didn't know it. Everyone waits for an opportunity to knock his neighbour out of the saddle. . . . And I'm a beast, too, don't you see, you innocent little dove? I want my children to live in a house built of stone and talk French ever better than you—*pardon, merci*, and all that. . . ."

Matryona returned with a bundle of twigs and chips which she threw beneath the pot suspended from the tip of the shaft, and glanced curiously from Alexei to Katya.

"Don't be unkind to her, Alexei," she said softly. "Have you watered the horses?"

Alexei turned and walked towards the horses. Matryona began poking the chips beneath the pot.

"He's in love with you," she said. "The girls I've tried to get him off with . . . he wouldn't have one of them! I don't know what'll come of things with you two—it won't be easy for either of you. . . ."

Matryona paused to hear what Katya would say, but Katya took out the cereals and lard in silence, spread a cloth on the ground, and began to cut the bread.

"Why don't you say something?"

Katya went on cutting bread, her head hanging low, and tears running down her cheeks.

The fertile steppe of the Ekaterinoslav Region, which extends to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, was a new region. This was that Wild Steppe where, in days of old, the short, plump, long-haired Scythians galloped shoulder-high in the tall grass, on shaggy ponies; where the Greek traders, heavily guarded, travelled from Olviopol to Tanais; where the Goths roamed in their huge wagons between the two seas, driving their herds of cattle before them. Hither from the northern boundaries of China came the many-tongued hosts of the Huns, like clouds of locusts, spreading such panic that the steppe remained deserted for centuries. The Khazars pitched their stripy tents here, on their way from Derbent to the Dnieper, where they went to fight the Russians; the Polovtzy tribes, in their silken Khorezm robes, sometimes roved as far as the Svyatoslav ramparts, with their vast herds of camels and horses; still later, the ground was

trampled by the Tatar hordes, assembling on their swift steeds to make their raids on Moscow.

Then the human tide subsided, leaving nothing behind it but funeral barrows, some of them crowned by stone idols with flat countenances and tiny hands folded over their bellies. The Ekaterinoslav steppe was gradually peopled by Ukrainian peasants, by Russians and Cossacks from the Don and the Kuban, and by German colonists. The great villages and innumerable farmsteads in it were new, with neither ancestral traditions, ancient folk songs, blossoming orchards or backwaters. It was a region of wheat and commonplace landowners, well up in the price of grain on foreign markets. Gulyai-Polye, a dull little town, extending along the marshy periodically drought-stricken little river Gaichur, was also new.

It was five or six miles over the steppe from the village to Gulyai-Polye. Roshchin hired a phaeton which took him to the big market held on the pastures. Here he haggled over the price of a roasted fowl with a saucy countrywoman, sprawling in her cart over the village produce she had brought to sell at the market. In her inexperience she lost her temper, alternately thrusting her wares under the customer's very nose and snatching them out of his hands with shrill curses, turning from side to side so as to make sure that nothing was being taken from the cart. She held out for five rubles for the roast fowl and next minute wanted for it, not money, but a reel of cotton.

"Take the money, goose!" said Roshchin. "You can buy thread with it—there's thread being sold over there."

"I can't leave my cart, put away your money, and get away from my goods. . . ."

Roshchin made his way to a fellow with a forelock, dressed in military uniform and hung all over with arms, who was roaming the market place, jiggling two reels of cotton in the palm of his hand. But the latter merely glanced murkily at Roshchin moving his swollen lips to form the words:

"I will only exchange for spirits."

And so Roshchin failed to buy the chicken. The market was almost entirely given up to barter of the most primitive nature—the value depending entirely on the demand: for two needles a sucking pig and a makeweight could be obtained, while the customer was made to pay through the nose for a

pair of unpatched cloth trousers. There were hundreds trading, shouting, and swearing as they swarmed amongst the innumerable carts. Here a hairdresser perched himself on a stool, or simply on a cart wheel, the implements of his trade spread out before him; there a photographer took instant portraits, using his tripod as a darkroom, and delivering a damp photograph to the customer at the expiration of five minutes. Blind fiddlers collected a circle of hearers, and did not scruple to plunge their hands into the pockets of a gaping booby.... All these people were ready, at the shortest possible notice, to abandon their posts, to flee, and to take cover, whenever the firing, which was an invariable feature of markets in Gulyai-Polye, threatened to become serious.

Making his way among the carts, Vadim Petrovich came upon an idle crowd in the neighbourhood of a roundabout; bewhiskered individuals, some in hussar tunics, some in reefer coats, and yet others in cavalry capes, hung with hand grenades, firearms, and cold steel, revolved pompously on the wooden horses with their absurdly extended necks and galloping legs. Some of them cried: "Faster! Faster!" in peremptory bass voices. Two ragged fellows worked with all their might to keep the roundabout turning. Two accordion players were playing the melody of a popular song, stretching out their instruments as far as they would go, as if to fill them with all the breadth and audacity of the soul of the Makhno freemen. "That'll do! Get down!" cried those who were waiting for their turn. "Faster!" roared the revolving horsemen. And now the pace became so furious that the tall cap of one rider flew off, and another, in his enthusiasm drew his sword, and brandished it as if cutting off the head some imaginary foe. Then the onlookers jumped on to the roundabout and tore the riders from their saddles. A hubbub arose, and there was a pummelling with fists to the accompaniment of piercing whistles, but the roundabout went, the fresh contingent of horsemen seated arms akimbo on the horses, which whirled by with eagerly dilated, crimson nostrils.

Vadim Petrovich turned aside, not seeing here a single intelligent face. He bought a slice of pie stuffed with cream cheese from a pedlar and strode munching over the cobblestones of the wide street. He had to find himself a lodging for the night. He had very little money, and if the price he

had paid for the piece of pie was any criterion, what he had would not last a week. He glanced absent-mindedly at the two-storey brick-built merchant's houses, the corn chandlers' shops and the painted signs, still absent-mindedly munching and meditating: after his leap for wild freedom, the trifles of life had lost the power to trouble him.

A cyclist, his front wheel wobbling, came riding towards him. After him came two horsemen, in Circassian capes and tall jauntily tilted sheepskin caps. The cyclist, a lean, short man, had on grey trousers and a high-school tunic, and his straight hair fell almost to his shoulders from beneath a peaked school cap, blue with white piping. When they drew level, Vadim Petrovich gazed with astonishment at the sodden face and faint eyebrows. The cyclist fixed a penetrating gaze on Roshchin, his wheel wobbling worse than ever so that he could hardly retain his seat; then, frowning furiously, and painfully puckering up a yellow face, as wizened as a baked apple, he rode past him.

A moment later one of the horsemen, turning his steed and approaching Roshchin at a short gallop, bent down from the saddle and stared at him, his eyes moving rapidly from side to side.

"What's the matter?" asked Roshchin.

"Who are you? Where do you come from?"

"Who am I?" Roshchin retreated from a strong smell of onion and raw spirits. "I'm a free man. I come from Ekaterinoslav."

"From Ekaterinoslav? And what are you doing here?" asked the horseman menacingly.

"I'm here to look for my wife."

"To look for your wife? Why did you tear off your shoulder straps?"

Trembling with rage, Roshchin replied as calmly as he was able:

"I chose to tear them off without asking you."

"You're very bold in your answers."

"Don't you try to frighten me, I'm not easily frightened."

The horseman let his gaze rove over Roshchin's face as if seeking for a reply there. Suddenly he drew himself up, his narrow, crooked features distorted with an insolent smile, dug his spurs into his horse's sides and galloped up to the cyclist. Roshchin strode on, stumbling in his agitation.

But the three caught him up in an instant. The cyclist in the schoolboy's cap cried shrilly:

"He doesn't want to talk to us, but he'll talk to Levka, all right."

The horsemen burst out into coarse laughter and hemmed Roshchin in on either side. The cyclist went ahead, sending the pedals round with drunken strength. "Get a move on!" shouted the horsemen, forcing Roshchin to keep up with their horses almost at a run. It was obviously useless to protest, or attempt escape. They stopped in front of a house built of brick, with a trampled patch of garden in front. The windows were blurred with chalk, and a black flag hung over the door, beneath it a sheet of plywood bearing the inscription: "Cultural-Educational Centre of Makhno's People's Revolutionary Army."

Roshchin was so enraged that afterwards he could not remember how he was pushed into the house and led along dark passages to a befouled and littered room, in which the air was so sour that it almost took the breath away. There immediately entered a glossy, smiling individual, with the waddle of a corpulent man, wearing a short tunic such as used to be worn by provincial musical-comedy stars and singers of comic songs.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, and sat down at a shaky table, sweeping the cigarette ends from it.

"The Old Man told us to find out whether this is a reptile, or not," said the man with the crooked face who had accompanied Roshchin.

"Get out now, Comrade Karetnik," said the fat man, and when the person addressed had departed, said to Roshchin: "Sit you down."

"Look here!" said Roshchin nervously, addressing the fat smiling man in the tunic. "I see I've fallen into the hands of the Secret Service. I'll explain all about myself, and why I'm here. I have nothing to hide. I came here to..."

"Take a good look at me," said the man in the tunic, taking no notice of Roshchin's words. "I'm Leva Zadov, it's no good lying to me. I will question you, and you will answer."

The name of Leva Zadov was no less famous in the south than that of the Old Man himself. Levka was an inquisitor, a man so amazingly cruel that it was said that Makhno had

more than once been on the verge of plunging his sword into him, but had remembered his devotion, and refrained. Roshchin, too, had heard of him. For the first time in his life his blood ran cold. He stood in front of the table. Levka Zadov sat there, rosy, curly-haired, enjoying his power over a human being, and the horror which he inspired.

"Come on now! Out with it! Are you a Denikin officer?"

"Yes. An ex-officer."

"An ex-officer! Tchh, tchh, tchh. . . . Where have you come from?"

"From Ekaterinoslav to Gulyai-Polye. I'm telling you. . . ."

"Tchh, tchh, tchh. . . . Why do you tell Leva you came from Ekaterinoslav when you came from Rostov?"

"I didn't—I came from Ekaterinoslav."

Roshchin began hastily looking for his ticket, and again for a moment his blood ran cold—supposing he had thrown it away! He found the ticket in the pocket of his tunic, together with a creased and faded photograph of Katya. He extended the ticket to Levka, who turned it over in his hands for a long time, holding it up to the light. There was no getting away from it, the ticket was all right, and this somewhat puzzled Levka, who had apparently already made up his mind, and even decided upon the sentence he would inflict. But the ticket changed everything, and Leva actually wiped the sneer from his face, his thick lips trembling in disgust.

"What made you get out at Gulyai-Polye if you're carrying dispatches to Denikin's headquarters?"

"I'm not carrying dispatches. It's two months since I left the army. I'm not in the army any more. I tore up my army ticket. I came here as a free man. . . ."

Levka never took his black eyes off Roshchin's face. This gaze, in which there was not a spark of human intelligence, caused Roshchin to muster all his powers to suppress his agitation and give careful thought to his replies. He began to explain as simply and comprehensibly as he could the causes which had led to his desertion. . . .

"If you go on lying to me any more, you swine," Levka interrupted him in a low voice, "I'll do things to you that even Sodom didn't do to Gomorrah. . . ."

With a swift, thievish movement he snatched Katya's photograph out of Roshchin's hand. He inspected it with the smile

of a connoisseur of women and said, flipping at it with his fingernail:

"And who's the little bitch?"

"That's my wife. I came here for her sake. Give me back her photo!"

"We'll put it on your bleeding corpse." Leva covered the photograph with a fat, greasy palm. "Come on, now, give us some intelligence stuff!"

"I shan't say another word!" shouted Roshchin.

"Oh, yes you will! Everyone talks to me!"

Levka rose in his seat with an easy movement, and his hand struck out at Vadim Petrovich's face, like a cat's paw. The blow was clumsy and fell on the victim's temple. Roshchin fell to the ground unconscious.

To its enemies the downfall of the Soviet Republic under their blows seemed imminent.

But it went steadily on, organizing all the achievements of mind and science, all the spiritual and mental forces of the people, in order to be able to go over to the attack. The military plan of the Bolsheviks consisted in subordinating all to the task of defence, never for a single hour relaxing the pursuance of profound social change, fearlessly inculcating in the life of the people principles, the realization of which belonged to the future. Next came the tasks of creating a three-million-strong Red Army, of organizing defences in the north, of carrying the attack into Siberia and the South Urals, and of developing main operations against Krasnov's Cossacks on the Don, and Denikin in the North Caucasus.

The Russian Soviet Republic, hemmed in on all sides by the armies of the White Guards, created a front covering upwards of fifteen thousand kilometres, and to this had recently been added the confused and intricate Ukrainian front.

The civil war raged with quite a special ferocity in the rich Ukraine. Profound breaches had been made between the various strata of the population by the recent occupation, the hetman regime and the vindictive restoration of the landowners. The workers and miners of the Donbas, the land-hungry peasantry and day labourers, were drawn towards the Soviet Power; the rich peasantry and the bourgeoisie,

fearing Revolutionary Committees, Poor Peasants' Committees, Executive Committees, commissars, and the grain requisitions, were drawn to the Independent Ukrainian Directorate, and its leader, Petlura. The latter was also supported by that section of the Ukrainian intellectuals whose only reply to the challenge of the Soviet Revolution was comprised in the words: "Get out, you blasted Muscovites!" For these worthies, the harsh facts of the history of the Ukrainian people, who had been shedding their blood in the struggle for independence for three centuries, were conveniently masked by the romantic items of the Ukrainian national costume: extravagantly full trousers ("wide as the Black Sea"), Cossack cloaks, crooked sabres, and imposing forelocks.

Petlura turned out the hetman and entrenched himself in the Directorate in Kiev, where he declared an independent republic and embarked upon a hopeless struggle with the proletarian revolution. He had at his disposal a few divisions made up of hetman's soldiers who had gone over to the Directorate, and of steady, disciplined Galicians who believed their dream of forming part of a Free Ukraine was coming true at last, not to mention all manner of riffraff, supporting themselves by marauding. But Petlura had neither the common sense nor the wit to offer the seething and divided Ukrainian peasantry something real and tangible, instead of mere pompous decrees, and so he had no reserves to draw upon.

In December, a secret Soviet government of the Ukraine was organized in the town of Sudja, Poltava Region. The Chairman of the Tsaritsyn Military Council sent Commander of the Tenth Army Voroshilov to Sudja, to join the government there. A Revolutionary Military Council was organized at Sudja.

By that time the regular Ukrainian Red Army of two divisions, which had been formed at Kursk long before these events, mainly from Ukrainian peasants escaping from trial and execution, had begun the attack on the west in the direction of Kiev, and on the south in the direction of Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav. Since two divisions were obviously inadequate, they counted on the support of guerilla detachments. And the most powerful of these was the detachment of Makhno.

Makhno was on a spree. Attiring himself in a school uniform which he had acquired after a raid on Berdyansk, he showed off by riding all over the town on a bicycle, or, together with his aide, Karetnik, he roved the streets singing to the accordion; another time he would put in an appearance at the market, pale and irritable, trying to pick quarrels; but everyone kept out of his way, knowing the alacrity with which his revolver was prone to fly out of his trouser pocket. Even the sturdy Makhno men, who feared neither God nor devil, catching sight of him near the roundabout, would scramble off the wooden horses and scamper off. The Old Man was obliged to carry on to the point of dizziness with no one but Karetnik for company.

Gulyai-Polye was buzzing with the rumour that Makhno had begun to drink heavily of late, and that there was a danger of his selling the army for drink. Very few guessed that it was all sheer cunning on his part. He was wily, secretive, slippery as a wild beast inured to the chase.

Makhno was playing for time. He was now confronted with the necessity of taking a serious decision. There were neither Germans nor followers of the hetman left to fight in the Ekaterinoslav Region. The landowners had fled. The smaller towns were all looted. And new foes were pressing in on him from three sides—the Volunteers from the Crimea and the Kuban, the Bolsheviks from the North, and the Petlurites, who had just occupied Ekaterinoslav, from the Dnieper. Which of them was the most dangerous? In which direction should he turn his machine guns? An instant decision must be arrived at. The army was thinning, its foundations were showing signs of shaking. The peasants in it were saying: "It's a good thing the Bolsheviks are coming to the Ukraine. Now we can go back to our homes and those who are not yet sick of the whole thing can stick a red star on their caps." The nucleus of the army, "The Kropotkin Black Hundred," hotheads who had made war their profession and were spoilt for work of any kind by the sweet freedom of life on horseback, declared: "If the Old Man takes it into his head to sell us to the Bolsheviks, we'll cut his head off in the sight of the whole army, that's all.... Petlura takes Ekaterinoslav, and we just sit and wait....

With nothing left to eat, naked and unshod, we shall soon be howling in the steppe with the wolves.... On to Ekaterinoslav, brothers!" The sailor Chugai, a delegate from the Commander in Chief of the Ukrainian Red Army, had been three days in Gulyai-Polye, waiting doggedly for Makhno to sleep off his drink and give him a hearing. And at the same time a celebrated philosopher, a member of the secretariat of the "Tocsin" (the anarchist confederation), had also arrived from Kharkov to speak to Makhno. The members of Makhno's Military-Political Council, local anarchists and his most intimate advisers, lay in wait everywhere for the Old Man, jealously adjuring him not to listen to anybody and to guard the supreme freedom of the individual.

Makhno knew very well that unless he now took a firm decision which would be satisfactory to the army, his cause and his glory would be lost. There were only two ways open to him: to make up to the Bolsheviki, and do what the Commander in Chief ordered, and then wait for the inevitable moment when he would be shot for arbitrary conduct, or to kill the delegate Chugai, and get up a peasant rising in the Ukraine against all authority whatsoever. But would the latter move be a timely one? Might it not be a mistake?

These thoughts were so secret that it would have been dangerous to voice them even to such devoted curs as Levka and Karetnik. Ideas crowded in upon him. The army was waiting. The delegate Chugai and the venerable and celebrated anarchist from Kharkov, were waiting. Makhno drank raw spirits without losing his self-control, purposely played the fool, and behaved outrageously, but his eye was keen, his hearing acute, nothing escaped him. And in his mind all was seething rage.

Having ordered the unknown man in the officer's great-coat who said he came from Ekaterinoslav, to be arrested and taken before Levka, Makhno himself very soon turned up at the Cultural-Educational Centre, and went with his bicycle straight to the interrogation cell. Levka Zadov, after his unlucky blow at Roshchin, sat on at the table, one of his fists placed on the other, his chin on top. Makhno glanced at the prostrate figure on the floor and propped his bicycle against the wall.

"What did you do to him?"

"I only gave him a pat," replied Levka.

"Fool . . . have you killed him?"

"How do I know—I'm not a surgeon."

"Did you interrogate him?" (Levka shrugged his shoulders.) "Is he from Ekaterinoslav? What does he say? Is he one of Denikin's spies?"

Makhno looked at Levka with such an intolerable scrutiny that the latter's eyes rolled uneasily beneath his eyelids.

"He must have information on him. Where is it? You're playing with death."

"I had no time, I'd only just begun, Nestor Ivanovich. How was I to know he was so delicate—a swine like that. . . ."

At that moment Roshchin gave a moan and bent his knee.

"See! It was just nerves!" exclaimed Levka joyfully.

Makhno was just going to grasp the handle bars of his bicycle again, when his glance fell on Katya's photograph lying on the table.

"Did you take it from him? Who is it? His wife?"

Like all people with strong will, concentration, suspiciousness and vast experience, Nestor Ivanovich had an excellent memory. He instantly remembered Katya's first appearance (when he had ordered her to manicure his nails), Alexei Krasilnikov's intervention, and all he had been told about this beautiful woman. He thrust the photograph into his pocket while pushing out the bicycle, but just then signs of animation returned to Roshchin's face, and his lips parted.

"Bring him to me," said Makhno. "I'll examine him myself."

All through the recent days of dissipation, Nestor Ivanovich had stuck firmly to one idea: the necessity of leading the army on Ekaterinoslav, taking the town by storm, and raising the anarchist banner over the City Duma. The army would be inspired and consolidated by the hope of such booty. Ekaterinoslav was rich, there were enough textiles and gewgaws in it for the whole province—at every village and hamlet they would be able to fling out lengths of cloth and print by the truckload, to shovel out sugar, to throw ribbons, military braid, shoes and stockings to the girls: "There you are, peasant-farmers—presents from the Old Man! See what a free regime, and no authority, without landown-

ers and the bourgeoisie, without Soviets or Cheka, does for you. . . ."

All the rest was not settled as yet. But now, looking at Katya's photograph, he suddenly came to a decision. It leaped at him like a jack-in-the-box. But he gave no sign that all within him was dancing with triumph. He mounted his bicycle and rode along the street to a long building with big windows, in front of which stood leafless poplars. This was the school, which served as headquarters: Makhno and his aides occupied a single room in it.

An hour later Roshchin was brought to him. Levka preceded him, and a Makhno man in a racoon cap made from a priest's coat collar, with a black ribbon slanting round it, went behind, pushing Roshchin in the back with the muzzle of his revolver. Makhno was seated on a chintz-covered sofa, through which the springs protruded.

"What's this?" he shouted in his shrill voice. "Are you playing at policemen, pretending to be tsarist gendarmes? Put down your gun! Get out!"

Jerking up his haggard, jaundiced face, he stuck out his chin at the convoy, who stampeded noisily out of the room. Makhno rose from the sofa, clenched his bony fist and struck Levka in the face, on the mouth and nose.

"Butcher!" he squealed. "Drunkard! Syphilitic! Befouling the cause! Befouling me!"

Levka Zadov, who knew the Old Man, did not wait for his wrath to work itself up to full pitch, but protecting his neck with his plump shoulders, and covering his face with his hands to avert further blows, fled to the door and closed it behind him.

Makhno removed his cap—his forehead was wet. Then he sat down on the sofa again. He only needed a rosary to look exactly like a fanatical lay brother.

"Take a seat, please," he said, indicating a chair to Roshchin with a wave of his long arm. "Whether you are to be shot or not, just the same it's disgraceful to insult human dignity. Take a cigarette and light up. Are you a spy?"

"No," said Roshchin thickly, smiling as he took a cigarette.

"Are you a Volunteer officer?"

"I deserted. I've done with them. What's the good of telling you—you won't believe me anyhow."

"People don't lie to me," said Makhno in that high,

peculiar voice of his, a voice it would have been well-nigh impossible to express in musical notation. Roshchin thought it was like the screech of a bird of prey. "People don't lie to me," he repeated, and his hot, unwinking eyes expressed such strength of will that it was difficult for anyone to endure their gaze without his own eyes filling with tears. But Roshchin endured it. His head was splitting from the blow he had just received, but having overcome this pain, he rallied all his powers for the final struggle.

"If you want information about the Volunteer Army, question me. But my information is not fresh. I went on leave two months ago. I made a false move this spring, and I shall pay for it with my life. You're going to have me shot. Sooner or later I'm bound to get the bullet that's coming to me for the mistake I made. . . ."

A gleam of amusement appeared in Makhno's eyes, and instantly vanished, "He doesn't believe me," thought Vadim Petrovich. "I must try something else." Taking a long draw at his cigarette, which he then placed on the edge of the table, and thrusting his hands into his belt, he went on:

"How did I get into the White camp in the first place? The way an apple rolls down a slope. Let me see. . . . We were the Russian intellectuals—that is to say the salt of the earth. We read Mikhailovsky, Kant, Kropotkin. We even read Bebel, and a lot of other soothing literature. I spent many a sleepless night talking about all this with Alexei Borovoi. . . ."* (As he had expected, at the mention of this name, a film seemed to come over Makhno's eyes, making them look for a moment almost stupid.) "We were filled with enthusiastic expectations. And then came the February Revolution! And everything ended on a sour note. Instead of the resplendent festival we had dreamed of—the streets littered with the husks of sunflower seeds . . . everywhere sailors, drab-looking soldiers . . . instead of the great country, dough, rye gruel without salt. . . ."

Makhno moved uneasily on the sofa, and then unconsciously relaxed, embracing his lean knees, as if he were at a May-day outing. The expression of his eyes changed to a doglike attentiveness.

* Alexei Borovoi was an anarchist theoretician of the day, popular among the anarchists surrounding Makhno.—*Author*.

"The intelligentsia, it appeared, were quite out of it. And when October came, we were simply picked up by the scruff of our necks and chucked on to the dung heap.... That's about all. The Volunteer Army is an all-Russian dung heap. There is not, and never can be anything creative, or even reconstructive in it. But it is capable of destruction, and of very serious destruction.... It's a pity I realized all this so late... but I'm glad I have realized it.... So there you are, Nestor Ivanovich...." (It came quite naturally to call him by his name.) "I ought not to live, nor do I specially want to... But there is one person... dearer to me than all philosophies, dearer to me than my conscience... that's the only thing that held me back."

"Is this her?" asked Makhno suddenly, showing him the photograph.

"Yes, that's her."

"Take it, I don't want it...."

Roshchin put Katya's photograph in the inside pocket of his tunic. Then he picked up the cigarette end and relit it. His hands did not tremble. He did not lose the thread of his narrative.

"So I tore up my identity card, and I have followed in her tracks to this place. And since I have taken up life once more, I want philosophy and ideology again. We're not mere drudges... the only thing I can accept... in the abstract, of course, quite in the abstract... is absolute liberty, wild liberty... it may be mad, impossible, of course... but since one must die, let it be for something beyond the realms of imagination."

"Come on, now, give me your dispatch—where have you got it?" said Makhno quietly.

Roshchin broke off abruptly, turned his head, and made a weak, hopeless gesture. Makhno sat motionless on the sofa for a long time. Suddenly he leaped up and began fumbling in a heap of objects piled up in a corner of the room—weapons, saddles, harness, paper bags.... Gathering up a few tin cans, and two bottles of spirits, he dumped them on the table, and began rolling the lid of a box of sardines over its key. "I'll take you on my staff," he said. "Your wife is in Company 6, with the Krasilnikovs, at the Prokhladni farmstead.... A delegate from the Bolsheviks will be here, soon. Let him think I'm making up to the Volunteers. Your

job will be to throw dust in his eyes. See? Do you play cards?"

This time Vadim Petrovich really did feel bewildered. He could only blink, not making the slightest attempt to understand the turn things had taken, and what it all meant. Breaking the key of the box of sardines, Makhno took a mother-of-pearl penknife with dozens of blades out of his pocket, and started manipulating them one after another, opening tins containing pineapples, pâté de foie gras, and lobster, till the whole room reeked with them.

"I can always have you shot, but I want to make use of you for the moment," he said, as if in answer to Roshchin's bewilderment. "Are you a staff officer, or an officer of the line?"

"I was on the staff of General Evert during the World War. . . ."

"...and now you'll be on the staff of Old Man Makhno. . . . When I was doing hard labour under the tsar, I was picked up by my head, and my heels, and flung on to a stone floor. . . . That's how the leaders of the people are forged. See?"

A telephone bell rang from a yellow box amongst the litter on the floor. Makhno, squatting on his heels, shouted into the receiver in his cackling voice: "Say I'm expecting him!"

Delegate Chugai, a strong, deliberate man, attired in a reefer-jacket, which, though worn, was neat and clean, his sailor's cap pushed on to the back of his head, held his cards in such a way that no one could get a look at them, his gleaming, prominent eyes following every movement made by Nestor Ivanovich. His broad set face, with the high cheekbones and small black moustache, was void of expression, but the bentwood chair every now and then emitted sharp reports beneath his weight. If he could have been plumped down among seven brass dragons with bulging throats, with his legs in the sailor's trousers stuffed into the wide tops of his low boots, tucked beneath him, he would have made a most convincing object of worship.

They were playing "goat", a game invented at the front to enable men to forget their wounds and fears in laughter

and jesting. Without so much as rising from the table or shaking hands, Nestor Ivanovich had proposed a game of "nines" to his guests the moment they entered (as though that was what he had invited them for). He dealt so rapidly that it was impossible to follow the motions of his hands, and flinging a thousand-ruble note on the table, covered it with the tin of lobster. But Chugai took his two cards and put them under the tin, too.

"Afraid?" asked Makhno.

"No—but I don't play 'nines'. Let's play 'goat'!"

Makhno, holding his cards under the table, sat sprawling with his back to the door, thus having free space behind him (a fact which Chugai was not slow to note). At his left sat Roshchin, at his right, Leon Chorni, member of the secretariat of the "Tocsin" Confederation. The latter, whose age it would have been difficult to guess, was a withered, wispy little man, so pigeon-breasted that there seemed to be no place for lungs in his puny chest, a man who could only be supposed to be kept alive by the spirit in him. His crumpled jacket was sprinkled with dandruff, and grey hairs, and he held his cards absent-mindedly, open to the view of all.

He had arrived prepared for an acute struggle with Chugai, whom he suspected of desiring to usurp Makhno and his army—a prospect fraught with inexhaustible potentialities. The thoughts of Leon Chorni were as concentrated as dynamite in a tin can. Somewhat puzzled by being confronted with a game of "goat" instead of the decisive struggle with the Bolsheviks which he had anticipated, he played the wrong cards, or dropped his cards under the table. He was "the goat" four times running. "Baa, baa, stinking goat!" shouted Makhno at him, laughing with the lower part of his face alone.

After each game Makhno stretched out his hand with a monkey-like movement for the bottle of spirits, pouring it out into cups and wineglasses, and watching to see that each drank an equal share. The talk around the table was of the most trifling nature, just as if it really was a gathering of friends to while away one of those damp, cold evenings when the rain lashes the dark window panes, and the wind, nestling in the bare tops of the poplars in front of the house,

whistling and moaning like a lost soul, sways them backwards and forwards.

Makhno was playing for time. But Chugai, too, could afford to wait—he was ready for anything, the more so since divers hints dropped by the host had led him to understand that the fourth member of the party around the table, the silent, correct, grey-haired man with the blue circles beneath his eyes, was a Denikin officer. It looked as if the first to break out would be Leon Chorni, who had already taken a dirty handkerchief out of his pocket, feverishly crumpling it into a ball, which he applied to his nose and eyes after every glass of spirits. And he fulfilled this expectation by a sudden outburst.

"We began arguing with you Bolsheviks as long ago as the Paris days," he burst out irascibly, waving his outspread cards towards Chugai. "The argument is not over, and nobody has yet proved that Lenin is right. To set up a workers' and peasants' State in place of a feudal-bourgeois State! But a State is a State. It's just one power for another. Taking off the noblemen's robe and putting on the peasant's blouse. And they think they'll have a classless society!"

He tittered, pressing the handkerchief to his dry lips. Chugai's face remained utterly impassive; he merely fixed his eyes on the tin of lobster, moved it closer, and, taking a forkful from it, said:

"And what's your proposal? Anarchy, the Mother of Order?"

"Destruction!" hissed Leon Chorni, who had by now almost lost his voice from the amount of spirits he had drunk. The tufts of his greyish goatee bristled like a dog's whiskers. "Utter destruction of our whole criminal society! Ruthless destruction—let it be razed to the ground, till not one stone remains upon another, so that no State, power, capital, cities, factories, can spring up again from the accursed seed...."

"And who will live on the wastelands you have made?"

"The people!"

"The people!" shouted Makhno, thrusting his chin towards Chugai. "The free people!"

"If we start by shouting," said Chugai, "we'll have to end by shooting." He took up the bottle and filled everyone's glass. (Leon Chorni pushed his glass away, so that the liquor

spilled.) "It's easy enough to destroy. But how d'you intend to go on living?"

Leon Chorni cut in before Nestor Ivanovich could reply.

"Destruction is what we are out for," he said. "Utter destruction—ruthless and terrible. All the energy, all the passion of our generation will go into that. You are in captivity, Sailor, in captivity to leaden-winged, pusillanimous thought. How will the people live when the State is destroyed, you ask? How will they live? Tee-hee!"

Makhno pounced upon him instantly.

"That's where we disagree, Comrade Chorni. I don't destroy small enterprises, I don't destroy the artels, I don't destroy peasant farming."

"So you're just as big a coward as this Bolshevik!"

"No, no, cowardice is the last thing he can be accused of," said Chugai, winking approvingly at Nestor Ivanovich, whose sodden face was as red as fire. "Nestor Ivanovich has never spared his life, everyone knows that. . . . We are not going to give him up to you as easily as all that. We shall fight over him."

"Fight? All right! Just try!" said Leon Chorni, his voice suddenly calm, and the tufts of hair on his chin smoothing down. He fell upon the *pâté de foie* with a kind of absent-minded avidity. Chugai cast an oblique glance at Roshchin, who was smoking imperturbably, looking up at the ceiling. Nestor Ivanovich bared his big yellow teeth in soundless laughter. "So that's it—collusion," said Chugai to himself. The chair creaked beneath the weight of his body. Chugai, whose mission it was to carry out the order of the Commander in Chief, and bring Makhno round to the idea of joint action, especially against Ekaterinoslav, had every reason to fear dangerous "organizational conclusions" should he be defeated in argument with this anarchist, who had doubtless devoured hundreds of ponderous tomes. Nor did he like the taciturn Denikin man, he could see by that mug of his that he was from the intelligentsia. Of course Chugai did not for a moment believe that he was on Makhno's staff. He rammed his cap more firmly on the back of his head.

"I want to put a question to you," he said.

"Certainly," said Leon Chorni, his mouth full.

"Comrade Lenin said: in six months there will be three million men in the Red Army. Could you, Leon Chorni, have mobilized three million anarchists in such a short time?"

"I'm sure I could."

"So we are to believe that you have a special staff for that purpose, are we?"

Leon Chorni pointed with his fork at Makhno.

"There's my staff," he said.

"Very good. Let us consider this personality. So you supply Nestor Ivanovich with arms and ammunition for three million fighters, including, of course, equipment, food supplies, fodder. Half a million horses alone would be required for such an army. Are we to understand you have all this?"

Leon Chorni pushed the now empty tin away from him. His forehead puckered into fine wrinkles.

"Don't try and frighten me with figures, Sailor! There's nothing behind those figures of yours, they're just pitiful attempts to sew together with rotting thread the fragments of this same old Russia. Sheer concealed nationalism! Three million soldiers in the Red Army! How very formidable! Supposing you do mobilize thirty million? Even then the true, sacred revolution will pass by your millions of peasant property-owners, all adorned with the Red Star. *Our* army. . . ." He banged on the table with his small fist. "Our army is humanity, our munitions are the sacred wrath of the people, no longer willing to endure State organization in any form—whether capitalism, or the dictatorship of the proletariat. . . . The sun, the soil, and man! And a great bonfire of all philosophical works, from Aristotle to Marx! An army! Five hundred thousand horses! Your imagination cannot soar above a sergeant major's moustache! You can have it! We will arm over a billion men. We will overthrow your armies so long as we have teeth and nails and there are stones underfoot, we will reduce civilization, everything to which you cling so desperately, Sailor, to a heap of ruins. . . ."

"Old gasbag!" thought Chugai, noticing how Makhno, who had at first been taut with attention, now sat with drooping shoulders, the colour fading from his hollow cheeks: he could no longer follow his teacher when the latter overstepped the bounds of common sense.

Then Chugai spoke:

"I have another question for you, Leon Chorni. . . ."

"Fire ahead!"

"If I have understood you right, you are not making preparations for wholesale mobilization. But everything needs something to start it. A bomb needs a fuse before it can detonate, to light a fire you must have a match. What fuse are you counting on? Where are your cadres? Makhno, here?" (Leon Chorni's eyes rolled—he was on the lookout for a trap.) "His army is fighting-mad, I know, but there's not a very great percentage of anarchists in it. It's not *your* army."

Chugai looked sharply at Makhno to make sure that he was not feeling in his pocket for a gun, but Makhno was sitting quite still. Leon Chorni smiled scornfully:

"We have come to a point when I shall have to teach you the alphabet, Sailor."

"I wish you would."

"The outlaws of society—there is our fuse, there are our cadres. Brigandage is the most honourable expression of the life of the people. . . . That must be understood. The brigand is a sworn foe to all forms of State, including your socialism, old man. . . . Brigandage is the proof of the vitality of a people. The true brigand is irreconcilable and untameable, destroying for the sake of destruction. He is the only truly democratic social element. Wake up!"

During this passionate explosion, Makhno started towards the door on tiptoe. He opened it, peeped into the passage, and went back to the table. Roshchin was now regarding Leon Chorni with curiosity, asking himself whether the fantastic old man was speaking in good faith, or merely trying to fool them.

"I can see from the way you're blinking, Sailor, that you're shocked," cried Leon Chorni. "Your virtue is appalled. Know then: we have broken our pens and emptied our inkpots—let blood flow, not ink! The hour has struck! The word is being converted into action. And anyone who, in this hour, fails to understand the profound necessity of brigandage as an elementary movement, anyone who is not on its side, belongs to the camp of the foes of the revolution. . . ."

Makhno screwed up his eyes and began biting his nails. "The old fellow knows what he's talking about," concluded Roshchin. Chugai, leaning over the table, planted his elbow on it, raising a finger to give Leon Chorni a point to focus on.

"Question three. Very well, say you mobilize these cadres, and they have done their business, turning everything upside down. Is not all this bound to come to an end sooner or later? It is. Your social outlaws (bandits, *we* call them) are spoiled people, they are unable to work. They won't work—why should they? They've got into the habit of taking anything they want that's lying handy. And now what? Are others to work for them? They're not to, you say. But there's nothing more to steal and plunder. So the only thing left for you to do is to drive the bandits over the edge of a precipice and kill them—is that it? Give me an answer to this question. . . ."

Utter silence reigned in the room, as if all the attention of the speakers was concentrated upon Chugai's raised finger, with its convex nail. Leon Chorni rose—small (he had looked taller, sitting), implacable as philosophic thought itself.

"Shoot him!" he said, turning towards Makhno, flinging his hand in the direction of Chugai. "Shoot him . . . he's an *agent provocateur*. . . ."

Makhno instantly leaped into the free space near the door. Chugai hastily drew his nails over the surface of the Mauser hanging down under his reefer-jacket. Roshchin took a step back from the table, stumbled and involuntarily sat down on the sofa. But no arms were drawn: each was aware that the gun once drawn, it must be fired. In his intensity, the eyes of Makhno shone.

"For shame, Dad!" said Chugai in didactic tones. "Cheap tricks like that are no argument. . . . You know what you deserve for calling me a *provocateur*!" (Here he displayed a fist so mighty that Chorni winced painfully.) "In consideration of your weak chest, I will not answer you as I might. . . . But you must be more careful what you say, Dad!"

Again Makhno did not stick up for his teacher. Leon Chorni lowered his eyes, as if trying to take shelter behind the tufts of his whiskers, and, picking up his coat with the rubbed collar, almost unrecognizable as beaver, and his equally shabby velvet peaked cap, he put them on, and went out of the room, bearing his defeat like a man.

"Well—shall we go on?" said Makhno, returning to the table and laying hold of the bottle. "Comrade Roshchin, go

and ask the officer on duty to show you where you will sleep."

Roshchin saluted and went out, but not too soon to hear Makhno say to Chugai:

"Makhno here, and Makhno there—and what have *you* to say to the Old Man?"

* XII *

It was only when he got home to the village of Vladimirskoye and paced over the ashes of his former home, lightly powdered with snow, when he inhaled the smoke coming from a neighbour's kitchen, and looked at the plump geese, which, though the winter was only beginning to set in, were already getting fat, spreading their wings and cackling as they half ran, half flew over the rime-covered meadow, that Alexei Krasilnikov realized how sick he had become of a brigand's life.

It was no job for a peasant, this rushing backwards and forwards over the steppe in army carts, from one burning farmstead to another. The peasant's way took the form of slow meditation about the soil, and work on it. Only be industrious, and old Mother Earth will reward you. Everything was a matter of rejoicing to Alexei Krasilnikov—the thoughts connected with farming, which he had quite forgotten about during his stay with Makhno, the mild grey day, the slow, infrequent snowflakes, the country stillness, and the smell of the familiar smoke of home. As he strode up and down he would stoop every now and then to pick up a rusty bit of roofing, a nail, a bit of scaling iron, and fling them into a heap. It was not the three cartloads of booty that he valued, but the thought that he would now be able to rebuild and start farming again, without having to count every ruble. There would be infinite work to be done between the driving of the first stake into the ground, and the day when Matryona would throw out of the oven the first fragrant loaf made from their own grain—"A new oven," she would say, "and look how nicely it bakes!" And this prospect, too, rejoiced Alexei—never mind, everything would grow up again in the sweat of the peasant....

Scraping among the ashes with the toe of his boot, he

found an axe with the handle almost burned off. Examining it carefully, he chuckled, wagging his head, and exclaimed: the very one! It had been the cause of all their trouble. He remembered how his brother Semyon, hearing Matryona's piteous cries, had rushed madly out of the house. Alexei had left it in the porch—stuck into the wooden block beside the door. If Semyon's eye had not chanced to fall on it, perhaps none of all this would have happened. . . .

"Oh, Semyon, Semyon!" Alexei flung the rusty axe on to the heap. "Things would go ever so much faster and better if we were together. . . . Yes, my friend, I've had my fill of noise and excitement. . . ."

Looking on the ground he gave himself up to thought. Semyon had written in the letter they received while they were still at Gulyai-Polye: "Tell my Matryona to please keep away from men—that sort of thing won't do her any good, it isn't the time for it. If I am killed, she will be free. . . . In times like these one must set one's teeth. I only remember you in my dreams. Don't expect me soon—the end of the civil war is not in sight yet. . . ."

Alexei gave himself a shake—to hell with the civil war—it was no good trying to look ahead, anyhow. His eyes wandered again to the peaceful smoke rising here and there from behind wattle fences, over leafless orchards, and huts swathed in reeds and straw. The peasants were preparing to make all snug against the winter. And they were right. The Red Army would be here in a week—two at the latest. Who said the end of the civil war wasn't in sight? Just some nonsense of Semyon's! Who else would be coming here, now? "Oh, Semyon, Semyon. . . . It's all that tossing on a destroyer in the Caspian Sea. It sends the blood to the eyes, and blinds a man. . . ."

And yet there was still confusion in the soul of Alexei. He made as if to draw out his tobacco pouch, but remembered with an oath that he had no paper for making a cigarette. An army doctor had told him that summer that there were many nervous cases in Makhno's army—a man could look perfectly healthy and gobble up gruel by the ton, and all the time his nerves could be like fiddle-strings. "Nerves!" growled Alexei. "We never heard about them in the old days!" Going up to a scorched kitchen chimney protruding forlornly out of the ashes, he tried to move it, to see if it

was firmly embedded. He leaned on it with his whole weight, and it moved . . . nerves, forsooth!

Alexei, Matryona, and Katya put up at a widowed relative of Alexei's. It was crowded and inconvenient, but Matryona whitewashed the stove, smeared a layer of greyish clay over the earthen floor, hung lace curtains over the tiny blurred windows. Alexei purchased supplies wherever he could get them—here a cartload, there a couple. In this way he laid in flour and potatoes, and fodder enough to last the horses till the end of the season. He never bargained, and was not sparing with his money, even giving a little salt to those who begged for it very earnestly—and salt was more precious than gold at that time. He knew that his fellow villagers considered his money easily obtained, and would long bear him a grudge for his three cartloads of goods and five horses.

It was a great deal harder to break down their opposition to his ideas for building a house. He wanted to pull down one of the wings of the manor house, the empty ruins of which stood on a slope amidst the leafless trees of the park. Nothing was left in the great house, where glassless windows gaped between peeling columns. But the wing in which the bailiff had lived was untouched. It would have been quite easy to pull it down and transfer it to the site of his burned-down house.

But the peasants still cherished vague fears. There were no authorities whatever in the village—the hetman had been driven out, the Petlurites, though still holding out, stuck to the towns, and the Reds had not yet arrived. And somehow—perhaps because they were unused to it—it felt queer to have no authorities over them. Supposing they were made to answer for it later. . . . So it was decided to elect a village elder. Nobody wanted the post. The wiser and more wealthy merely waved aside the proposal: "Get away with you—not I!" And nobody wanted to put some poor fellow with nothing to lose, in this position. From the Soviet districts came rumours that these same poor fellows, once elected, lost all their meekness, and then you should see how lively they became!

It was the women who found the right man. One told another, and soon the whole village buzzed with the tidings: it was the will of God that Gaffer Afanasy should be

made the village elder. The Gaffer was living at his ease with his two daughters-in-law (his sons had fallen in the war with Germany), never worked in the fields, and did nothing but look after the poultry and the house and scold his daughters-in-law. He was a petty, captious old man. In his time-long, long ago—he had served under General Skobelev.

Gaffer Afanasy made no bones about accepting the post: "Thanks for the honour you do me, but mind, I shall make myself obeyed!" From this moment, his grey beard parted in the middle à la Skobelev, his sheepskin coat belted low on his hips, he went about the village leaning on a hazel staff, looking for something to find fault with. Alexei always took off his cap and bowed respectfully when he met him. And Gaffer Afanasy, knitting his formidable eyebrows, would ask:

"Well, how are you getting on?"

"All right, thanks, Afanasy Afanasyevich. Same old trouble."

"Still can't come to terms with the peasants?"

"You are my only hope, Afanasy Afanasyevich. If you'd only look in, some time."

"Rather too much honour for you, eh?"

But Alexei at last managed to lure Afanasy Afanasyevich to his home. He sent Matryona to the old man's daughters-in-law to buy the fattest goose they had, and at the same time to tell them that they would be having a name-day party the next day... they were inviting nobody, their room was so small, but would be glad to see any good friend who cared to drop in. And Gaffer Afanasy was inquisitive. Scarcely had the winter dusk enveloped the village, when he went to the name-day party in the well-heated hut, in which a strip of carpet led from the door to a table, laden with good things. In other huts, kindling or a sooty wick floating in discarded tin cans, was used for illumination, but here an oil lamp hung over the middle of the table.

Gaffer Afanasy entered looking very stern, as befits authority, and took off his cap, his eyes falling first on the beauteous Matryona, with her pursed lips and hard black eyes, and then on that other, about whom there was so much talk in the village, the one whose name day it was, also a beautiful woman. Both Matryona and Katya wore

town dresses, Matryona's red, Katya's black. Gaffer Afanasy unwound his scarf, took off his sheepskin coat, and rapidly parted his beard to either side of his face.

"Well," he said in flattered tones, "my respects to this pleasant company!"

They all four sat down to table. Alexei produced a bottle of prewar vodka from beneath the table, and a polite conversation began.

"Let me introduce you to my intended, Afanasy Afanasyevich—it's her name day. I hope you will like her."

"So that's it. Of course I will—women need to be loved. Where does she come from?"

"She's the widow of an officer," answered Alexei. "I used to be her late husband's orderly. . . ."

The Gaffer kept on exclaiming: "Fancy that, now!" There would be something for him to tell the women. He felt an impulse to boast, himself. "When I got the St. George at Plevna, General Skobelev made me his orderly. He was always sending me about under cannon fire. . . . 'Gallop away, Afonka!' he would say. He was ever so fond of me! . . . So your bride is from the gentry. She'll find village work hard. . . ."

"Village work is not for her, Afanasy Afanasyevich. But we can afford to hire help, thank God. . . ."

"Of course, of course. . . . Well then, let's drink the health of your bride—bitters to the sweet!" The Gaffer drank off his glass, cleared his throat loudly, and ruffled his yellowing moustache with his hand. "You should see the sacks my daughters-in-law lift now! At first, when their husbands were sent to the war, and the silly wenches had to do men's work, it was: 'Oh, my back will break . . . oh my poor hands, my poor legs!' I nearly died of laughing." The Gaffer gave a foolish guffaw. "I know how to manage women. General Skobelev used to call me Afonka the lady-killer. . . ."

Matryona rose abruptly, trying to hide her laughter, and went behind a curtain to the stove, to get the roast goose. Katya sat at the table, quiet and modest, with downcast eyes. Refilling the glasses, Alexei said with feeling: "It's not that which troubles us, Afanasy Afanasyevich. I'd celebrate the wedding tomorrow, but how can I ask a young bride to live in such a hovel? She and Matryona sleep huddled-up on one bed, and I sleep on the bare floor. . . . It seems hard that the

rural community should regard us as strangers. Why are they so obstinate about that wing? It is quite useless where it is. It's the merest chance it wasn't burned down. Who wants it? Are they waiting for the noble lord to come back and thank them?"

"That's what some people think," assented Afanasy, mumbling the goose's leg.

"The devil himself will come back first. But never mind that...if I buy this wing from the community, I'm answerable for the consequences..." (Matryona shot a quick glance at Alexei, who banged on the table.) "I'll buy it! I'm an impatient man.... Oh, well...never mind...we'll celebrate this happy occasion—Matryona, fetch me what is wrapped up under my pillow." (Matryona frowned and shook her head.) "Give it here—you needn't grudge it! Nothing is more precious than life."

Matryona handed over the bundle. Alexei unwound the wrappings and exposed to view a watch of burnished steel, a repeater, with a steel chain. He gave it a shake and held it to his ear.

"I got it by chance, as if I knew who I intended it for. Wear it, Afanasy Afanasyevich, and God bless you!"

"What's this—you're offering me a bribe?" said Afanasy Afanasyevich severely, but his hand shook when Alexei placed the watch in it.

"Don't hurt our feelings, Afanasy Afanasyevich—it's a gift from the heart.... I have scores of trifles of this sort, Matryona was always getting them in exchange for spirits. What makes this one so valuable is that it strikes the hour. You won't have to listen for the cocks crowing at dawn—just press this spring, and it strikes, and you can put on your boots and go and see to the cattle...."

"Ah-h-h!" sighed the Gaffer, opening his mouth wide and exposing almost toothless gums. "I could wake my wenches! They won't be able to oversleep now, the fat hussies!"

Winding the scarf round his scraggy neck, the old man, staggering, put on his sheepskin coat, and took his departure. Lowering the flame of the lamp, Matryona helped Katya to clear the table and take the dishes behind the curtain. Alexei remained at the table.

"That prewar stuff must be very strong," he said, in hollow tones, "or perhaps it's because I haven't had anything

to drink for so long. Why don't you go and have a look at the cows, Matryona?"

Matryona made no reply, as if she had not heard him speak. A minute or so later she chuckled and glanced at Katya.

"I can't make you out..." went on Alexei. "Aren't we good enough for you, or are you a real simpleton?"

In obedience to Matryona's fiery glance, Katya said nothing, but her cheeks glowed.

"If you only cried, or something," went on Alexei. "I've never seen anyone like you before, so help me if I have! I tell people she's my intended, and she doesn't turn a hair—just sits there with her eyes cast down. She isn't made of ordinary flesh and blood! She's a pixie, I swear she is! Matryona, come here! She doesn't even understand that the children point at her. Everyone says: 'Alexei brought her here in his cart, he won her at cards from Makhno!...' and it's all one to her.... But what about me?" He suddenly began shouting furiously. "She's my intended, and I don't care who knows it!"

Katya turned pale and made as if to go back, a kitchen towel and a plate in her hands, but Matryona detained her with a strong grip on her shoulder.

"We know now which end to take hold of life by... I killed my first man back in 1914." Alexei gave a short laugh. "I sat there watching a German crawling up—he lifted his head, I clicked the trigger, and he flumped down sideways. I waited to see if his soul would fly out of him. I've killed plenty since, but I never saw anybody's soul.... That'll do... thanks for the lesson. We'll build a house on the embers of the old one: first a wooden one, and then a stone one, and then one with a roof of gold. You shouldn't treat me so, Ekaterina Dmitrevna. I'm not keeping you by force. If you don't like me, if you loathe me, you can go your ways. My betrothed! A fat lot of pleasure I'm to have from my courting...."

Matryona let her lips slide down Katya's cheek and whispered in her ear: "He's drunk, the fool, take no notice...." Katya hung the towel on the line and came out from behind the curtain. Alexei remained sitting sideways at the table, his legs crossed, one great swollen hand dangling, watching Katya from his sunken eyes. She came back

and sat down on a stool opposite him. There was nothing drunken in Alexei's steady gaze, and she looked down.

"It's time we had a talk, Alexei Ivanovich," she said. "I look upon you as a good man, Alexei Ivanovich. All through our campaigning life together, I've met with nothing but true kindness from you. I've become fond of you.... What you have just said comes as no surprise to me. I've been expecting it for a long time.... But something has happened to you since we came here, Alexei Ivanovich. You're a different person...."

Alexei cleared his throat before asking:

"What d'you mean 'a different person'? I've been the same person thirty years, and now you say I'm different...."

"My life has been one long dream, Alexei Ivanovich... you see... I was simply a useless household pet.... Oh, yes—I've been loved! But what's that? A touch of disgust, a touch of despair.... The awakening came when we were hemmed in by war: death, destruction, suffering, refugees, hunger.... There was nothing for the useless household pet but to whimper and die...and that is what would have happened, if Vadim had not saved me. He told me, and I believed him, that our love was the whole meaning of life. But all he sought was vengeance and devastation.... And he was a kind man, wasn't he? I can't understand it...." (She raised her head, staring at the lowered flame in the tin lamp hanging above the table.) "And Vadim died.... Then you picked me up."

"Picked you up!" He laughed, never taking his eyes off her face. "What d'you consider yourself—a homeless cat?"

"That's what I was, Alexei Ivanovich. But I don't want to be one any longer. I was neither good nor bad, neither Russian nor foreign—a pixie!" The corners of her lips twitched irrepressibly, and Alexei frowned. "And suddenly I discovered I was just a Russian woman, and nothing else...and now I'm never going to stop being one.... I have seen much that was sad and much that was terrible, while I was with you.... But I bore it, I didn't make a fuss.... I remember that evening when men came riding up while the horses were being unharnessed...excited, noisy men round the boiling pot...."

"Hear that, Matryona? She remembers...."

"More and more of them gathered round the boiling

pot. . . . Each one told of the glorious blows he had struck, boasted of cutting off heads, galloping right up to the enemy and clashing arms with him. Probably lots of it was sheer invention. . . . But there was something big, something powerful in it all. . . ."

"D'you know what it is she's remembering, Matryona? The battle against the Germans at the Verkhny farmsteads . . . it was a great fight, that!"

"I remember you jumping out of the cart. I was afraid to go up to you. . . ." Katya fell silent, as if her dilated pupils could see something far, far away. "That's how it was, and when we came here I told myself I was starting on a vast, new life . . . not just life on a little plot of earth . . . but here there are only pigs and hens and a vegetable plot, and beyond that a board fence and grey, hopeless days. . . ." (Katya wrinkled up her forehead. Her poor brain was unable to express the vast, almost tangible visions she had had in the steppe.) "When we got here, it was as if the holiday was over. . . . Today you announced me as your betrothed, and you did it deliberately. And now everything's settled. What next? Have children. . . . You will build a house, soon you'll be prosperous, and then even rich. . . . I know all about that, that's what I left behind me. . . . It was like that in Petersburg, in Moscow, and in Paris . . . and now it's going to start all over again in the village of Vladimirskeye. . . ."

There was such weariness in the way her hands lay in her lap, in the bend of the head, showing a straight parting in her warm-tinted, light-brown hair, that Alexei had to close his eyes for a moment . . . the firebird had flown away, had eluded his grasp. . . .

"How foolish you are, Ekaterina Dmitrevna," he said softly. "What a muddle you're in! Do you want to bathe in blood, like my brother Semyon? What you say astonishes me . . . but I'm not going to let you go, all the same. . . ."

* XIII *

Ivan Ilyich and Dasha went back to the regiment and settled down in a clay hut on the territory of the farmstead. Telegin's office, with telephones, a till, and the sheathed colours, was next door, on the other side of the entry. The

hut was Dasha's exclusive domain. Here were: a tall, Russian stove, not used for cooking, inside which Dasha washed as the Cossack women had taught her—strewing the inside with straw, and getting right in; a bed with two hard pillows and one thin blanket (Ivan Ilyich covered himself with his greatcoat); a table covered with a clean cloth, at which they ate; a small hanging mirror; a broom beside the door; and—in a niche in the whitewashed stove—the china kitten and puppy.

Two years before, Dasha and Ivan Ilyich, then dizzy with love, had set up house together in much the same way. Dasha would never forget their first evening in the new flat, with the windows open on Kameno-Ostrov Street, the pavement still moist after a shower. She had felt virginally serene and calm, but she had seen, by the way Ivan Ilyich was sitting in the dusk at the window, that he was suffering agonies of embarrassment, and had decided to make him happy by taking the initiative. "Come, Ivan," she had said, and they had gone into the bedroom, where a great vase full of fragrant mimosa stood on the floor. She had opened the wardrobe door and undressed in its shelter, and then run barefoot across the floor, and crept under the bedclothes, gasping out: "Do you love me, Ivan?"

She had been very ignorant in matters of love, though she had thought about them more than was good for her. What had passed between herself and Ivan Ilyich had been a disappointment. It had not been that experience, for the sake of which so many poems and novels had been written, so much music composed, that magical force, evoking ecstasy and tears, of which Dasha had dreamed, seated alone at the Steinway grand in Katya's empty flat, and breaking off in the middle of a piece, to start up, with interlaced fingers. . . . In such moments she had felt that the feelings boiling up within her must have choked her if her whole body had not been as cool and transparent as glass.

Soon after she had become pregnant. She loved Ivan Ilyich more than ever, but now she kept him off. Then had begun the terrible months—hunger and the murk of a Petrograd autumn; the appalling incident on the Lebyazhi Canal, resulting in a premature birth; the death of the baby, and a single desire—to cease to live. After this had come separation.

Now everything had begun all over again. Their feelings were more complex, more profound than those of the former ethereal and impassioned state, when everything had seemed to be riddles and enigmas, packed in some brightly coloured magic box, full of unknown gifts. They had both been through a great deal and had not yet had a chance to tell one another their experiences. Their love was now—or so it seemed to Dasha—as full and tangible as the air in early winter, when November storms have subsided, and the first snow, smelling like a sliced watermelon, fills the frosty stillness. Ivan Ilyich knew everything, could do anything, could find an answer to any question, solve any doubts. And again the brightly painted magic box floated before Dasha's eyes, this time filled not with wilful, overpowering sensations, but with the joys and sorrows of an austere life.

There was one aspect of Ivan Ilyich which Dasha could not quite understand or reconcile herself to, and that was his reserve. Every evening, before going to bed, Ivan Ilyich became preoccupied, sitting on the bench, with averted eyes as he grunted and pulled off his boots, sometimes even, when he had taken them off, saying: "Go to sleep, Dasha, there's a darling!", and going barefoot across the cold entry to the office. He would return on tiptoe and get cautiously into bed, trying not to jangle the bed springs and lying on her very edge, and in a minute he would be asleep, his overcoat drawn right over his head.

But during the day he was invariably cheerful, lively, rosy, running in and out, kissing Dasha's cheeks and her dear, warm fair head.

"Good morning, once again, Mrs. Commander! How's everything getting on?"

He would repeat this question thirty times a day.

Commissar Ivan Gora had asked Dasha to organize a regimental theatre with the aid of local talent.

Dasha, panic-stricken, had wanted to refuse: "Good heavens! I know nothing about it!" But Ivan Gora had patted her hand, saying:

"You'll be all right, my dear—you'll learn through your mistakes—you've done harder things! So long as we can shake off the usual routine stuff. Find us something revolutionary, something soulful, something to make the eyes of the men burn!"

The Commissar was in a hurry for the theatre to be organized. The Kachalin Regiment, its equipment and uniforms supplemented from the sparse resources of the Tsaritsyn commissariat, was preparing to go to the front any day, now. And despite the exhausting drills and the daily two hours of political study, the men, thanks to the food they got at the farmsteads, were beginning to feel their oats. A meeting was held.

Sergei Sergeyevich Sapozhkov saw in this meeting a chance to open his mouth after so many years of silence, and let loose upon the world the mass of ideas with which he was fairly bursting. He spoke of the revolutionary changes in the theatre, of the destruction of all barriers between actors and audience, of the theatre of the future, to be held either in the open air, or in vast buildings capable of seating fifty thousand at a time, theatres in which whole regiments would take part, guns would fire, balloons go up, real waterfalls cascade, and in which the heroic dramatis personae would no longer be individual actors, but the masses.

"Where are you—playwrights of the future?" Throwing out his arms as if he meant to fly up to the beams, Sapozhkov addressed the Red Army men, who listened good-humouredly to him, though many of his words, rushing out, one after another with bewildering rapidity, were obscure to them. "Where are you, playwrights of our boundless era—modern Shakespeares? What Sophocles will descend from his marble pedestal and take part with us in a festival of art, a festival of creation? Has man ever before stood before you so utterly exposed? Has history ever before scattered such a wealth of ideas?"

A speech like this, of course, could only increase Dasha's timidity. But no retreat was open to her.

She went to Tsaritsyn with Sapozhkov to get books, canvas, and paints, and some of these necessities they did get. Sergei Sergeyevich lavished advice upon her—some of it was useful, but the greater part was crazy. It was decided to get a cast together without useless preliminaries, and start rehearsing Schiller's *Robbers* immediately.

Telegin was delighted—not so much by the thought of the coming performance, but because Dasha had at last found work, was absorbed in it, running about doing this and that, talking to the men, flying into a rage, sometimes fairly

weeping with vexation, and (as he, in the simplicity of his heart, imagined) secure against a return of the former undue concentration on her own feelings.

- Agrippina, Anisya, and Latugin (the latter having applied personally to the Commissar, in case he should be overlooked), were sent to join the theatrical troupe by a regimental order, as were Kuzma Kuzmich, Baikov and a few others, accordion and balalaika players and singers.

Dasha read the play to them that night in a shed, illuminated only by a candle end. In its feeble light the faces of the actors scarcely showed through the steamy mist formed by the breath issuing from innumerable mouths. A wind was rising, and driving snow through the loosely fitting leaves of the barn door. Dasha read in a clear voice, trying to remember how Bessonov used to read aloud: one hand thrust into the front of his black frock coat, the exaggeratedly impersonal intonations, words dropping out like pellets of ice, and, seated in armchairs around him, the heavily breathing literary ladies, greedily swallowing these words. . . .

Before she was half through with her reading, Dasha realized that the play was not having a success, though a great many cuts had been made in it. Towards the end she was gabbling with all her might to get it over. There was a painful silence when she shut the book, and at last she said:

"Well, that's Schiller's *Robbers*, which we are to act. . . ."

The men lit cigarettes, and someone—it was Latugin—said:

"A very brainy piece."

At this, Kuzma Kuzmich, producing from his pocket a fresh candle end, lit it and went and sat down beside Dasha.

"Comrades, Darya Dmitrevna has acquainted us with the play—now I will read it to you!" he said.

Taking the book from her, he began reading very loud, now depicting with his voice and all his features the paternal grief of the aged Count Moor, now hissing out the words, his nose looking flatter than ever, and his eyes rolling: "I would be a contemptible ninny if I could not tear a favourite son out of his father's heart—even if he were chained to it with links of steel. . . . O! Conscience—thou art a fine scarecrow for sparrows. . . . Let him who can, swim, and him, who is too heavy, sink. . . ."

His hearers could see in their mind's eye that crawling serpent, Franz Moor. But Kuzma Kuzmich's voice grew suddenly stronger, he passed his hands through his hair, smoothing it over his bald spot, thrust his lips out ferociously, his eyes gleaming with noble rage: "Oh, men! False, lying offspring of the alligator! A kiss on their lips, a dagger in their hands, to thrust into the heart of another. . . . Hell and a thousand devils! Glow as with fire, patience of a noble soul, become a tiger, thou meek sheep. . . ."

Anisya gasped softly; Latugin leaned his whole body towards the candle, whose rays gilded the magic volume, beneath the lines of which Kuzma Kuzmich's fingernail was slowly travelling. The voice of Karl Moor himself—a rebellious man whom the hearers, stirred to the depths of their being, could thoroughly understand—thundered through the dark shed. And the words he found in which to relate the injuries done to him! There's a play for you—goes right to the root of the matter!

When Kuzma Kuzmich, in the light of the dying candle, uttered the last words of Karl, who, on his way to his terrible execution remembered the poor day labourer, Anisya and Agrippina were wiping their eyes on the sleeves of their coats. "Very true to life," said Latugin. And all agreed that Karl should not have killed, in a moment of passion, his beloved Amalia—she should have been taken into the band, and her character reformed. Here, Schiller must be altered, otherwise a trifle like that might prevent the Red Army men appreciating a good play, and there might even be harmful consequences. Amalia was reprieved there and then, and Karl made to say to her: "Go home, unfortunate one!", whereupon she left the stage, weeping bitterly.

The part of Amalia was assigned to Anisya, Latugin undertaking that of Karl. Baikov was suggested for the loathsome serpent Franz, but it was feared he would not be able to restrain his emotion, and would make the audience laugh—his beard would bring down the rafters. It was decided that Kuzma Kuzmich was to play Franz, and he was ordered to shave off his beard and whiskers to make him look younger. Vanin, a Red Army man with a deep powerful voice, was given the role of the aged Count Maximilian von Moor. The remaining parts were seized upon by Agrippina and some young soldiers. Somebody brought in

tow and lamp oil, and the flaming torch shed a bright light over the barn. They started rehearsing on the spot.

It was almost morning by the time Dasha got home, but she spent a long time telling Ivan Ilyich all about the rehearsal, he sitting barefoot on the side of the bed with his coat thrown over his shoulders, rocking with laughter. . . .

"Latugin as Karl Moor!" He snorted and spluttered, holding his sides. "You're killing me . . . don't you know why the rascal wants to play Karl Moor? He's making up to Anisya. . . . And Sharigin wants his guts. . . . Kuzma Kuzmich will be all right as Franz. . . . What'll they wear? They can't strut and posture in army tunics. I'll send the manager of supplies, some Petrograd barrister got stuck at the farmstead. . . . We'll enrich our wardrobe with a couple of frock coats and tail coats from his luggage."

"It's simply no pleasure telling you anything when you snort like that. Let go of me!"

Dasha got into bed and lay down close to the wall, her back turned to her husband. When he tucked the blanket carefully beneath her, covering her feet with the greatcoat, for the stove had been out a long time, and it was chilly in the hut, Dasha fell asleep, murmuring: "Everything will be all right."

Nothing was now talked about in the regiment but the theatre. Sapozhkov gave a lecture on German literature of the *Sturm und Drang* period, comparing the tempestuous geniuses—Schiller, Goethe, Klinger—with the young eagles aroused by the lightning which heralded the storm of the Great French Revolution. So many questions were showered upon him that a series of lectures on the late 18th century had to be announced, and Sapozhkov sat up night after night by the light of a floating wick, scribbling in pencil and racking his brains, since in default of books he had to make do with the smoke of home-raised tobacco. He was bombarded with questions at the lectures—the Red Army men wanted to know everything. If he so much as touched on a subject, they insisted on complete details. He merely dropped a word in passing about the Decembrists, but was made to tell all he knew about them.

They listened to him by the hour, conquering their fatigue; if anyone dozed it was only for a moment. The tale of

long past times, of a foreign country, where people like themselves, hoisting a red cap on a pike, turned out in a body against the whole world. Hungry, barefoot, they invented new military tactics in order to conquer. And, once they had conquered, they had been bound hand and foot by those whom they had forgotten to behead in time.

"Oh, Maximilien Robespierre!" exclaimed Sapozhkov in a single hoarse utterance of his breaking voice. "You could have conquered, you could have saved the revolution! Your fate was sealed on the day you tore the black banner of the Commune from the Paris town hall. . . ."

Cocks were already crowing in the yards, and Commissar Ivan Gora entered, booming out the warning:

"Reveille in three hours, Comrades!"

Dasha, who was prompting, interrupted the actor.

"Stop! You seem to be acting a dead man, Comrade Vanin. Why do you force yourself to cough? Where did you get that disgusting naturalism from? You must act with more warmth, put more soul into it. . . . Start again from the very beginning."

Among the books brought from Tsaritsyn Dasha had come across a magazine in which was an article by Kugel, entitled: "Shadow for Substance."

It was practically a diatribe against the Art Theatre. The author referred to the great Russian tragedians who had seized the minds and hearts of audiences by the intensity of their genius. The theatre had been a pagan temple in those days, and the curtain had seemed like the mysterious veil of Tanith, Goddess of the Moon. Alas! the race of great tragedians was now extinct, the last of them, Mamont Dalski, had exchanged his buskins for a pack of cards. The great stirrers of the human soul had been substituted by the producer, a learned gentleman offering the estimable audience a mood, a swaying curtain, a door with real panels, and the humming of gnats, in the place of a human soul crucified on the stage for the benefit of spectators. . . . "No!" exclaimed the author. "The true theatre is a shaggy monster, ravaged by passions!" From this article Dasha culled a few practical details which she thought might be of use to her in rehearsing.

Latugin and Anisya sat a little apart from the rest, waiting for their cues. Anisya's face seemed to have grown actually thinner during these days—after all it is no joke trying to get under another person's skin. She lost her appetite—food had become hateful to her. She racked her brains to discover a way of making Amalia real to herself, till at last she came upon a clue—a picture in a book of this young lady in wide skirts, mournful, her cheek propped on the palm of her hand. Anisya, sighing, looked long at the picture, and suddenly found the right solution: formerly, when plunged in sorrow, I wandered grief-stricken, I knew not where, stumbling, going from village to village, half blinded by tears, and stretching out my hand for a dry crust. . . . No, that picture is wrong. If Amalia, with all her silks and velvets, had had Anisya's grief to bear, this is how she would have wrung her hands and flung out her arms in their short, lace-trimmed sleeves, this is how she would have turned up her eyes!

And so, gradually, Amalia von Edelreif, the beloved of Karl Moor, was reincarnated in Anisya. At the rehearsal of the day before all had been struck silent when, removing the high-crowned hat with its star of red bunting, and, smoothing back her dishevelled locks, she sank on to a stool and said, in a voice that went straight to the hearts of her hearers:

"In the name of God, I beseech thee. . . . In the name of all the saints. . . . I no longer crave for love. . . . All I ask for is death. . . . Forsaken, forsaken! . . . Dost thou understand the dread sound of that word—forsaken? . . ."

That morning at drill, the section leader had wanted to give her extra fatigue duty for utter inattentiveness, and the Commissar himself had had to intervene, and get the penalty changed to a severe reprimand. And now she was sitting quietly next to Latugin, her great blue eyes dreamy, her lips, now smiling, now quivering, silently forming words.

"I used to know a bright-eyed girl, Sasha her name was," Latugin was telling her under his breath. "I was only fourteen, and she was seventeen. I don't know whether it was her walk, or what, but when she came home with her rake from the field with the other girls, wearing a little shawl and a bright yellow bodice, it seemed as if she was just going to cuddle up to you. They sold her to an old man, and my Sasha wilted. And you wonder why fellows like us are so restless." Anisya's cheeks flushed ever so slightly as he spoke, as if

his words were caresses. "We seek some marvellous life, something untried, never before known, my sweet Anisya. We all think of the only one, of a woman we cannot even dream of. . . ."

"There isn't any such person."

"What do you know about it? There are such women living on a coral reef in the Pacific Ocean."

Anisya looked at his bull-like countenance, with the wide-apart eyes, and again something trembled within her, and a warm tender sensation swept over her whole being. But the old, docile, female languor was not for her any more—the bad old times were over, thank goodness! Now she was quite cheerful, and said, chuckling:

"Have you ever been there?"

"What does that matter? It's all written down in the sea log."

"What sea log?"

"The book about all sorts of ocean wonders."

"How you do run on, Latugin!"

"You listen, and I'll go on spinning yarns, Anisya! But here's the truth for you: I once intended to do you wrong, Anisya, but a certain person gave me a talking-to—he rubbed my nose in the dirt, the way they train kittens. . . . Well—man is the lord of creation. I am thankful for the lesson. . . ."

Anisya glanced at him again, but this time in wonder. Latugin had spoken so loudly that Dasha rapped on the table with her pencil: "We're rehearsing, Comrades—please don't disturb us!"

"There are *Skoptsi** in Kerzhenets, where I come from," he continued in a whisper. "They geld themselves, because they can't control their passions. One of them said: 'I dream of the bird of paradise all the time, but when I open my eyes, there's nothing but murk and misery.' They are vicious and flog their wives almost to death . . . and then they go to a farrier—their 'white dove' and say: 'Save me!' and he snuffs out their flame as if it were a candle. 'Go thy way in peace, Gelding, and the Lord be with you. . . .' You'll see, Anisya, we will wash in blood, and be boiled in caustic, but we will catch

* Sect practising castration.

the glorious bird, even if it flies away to the very rim of life. . . ."

Again Dasha rapped her pencil.

"Comrades—Karl, Amalia, last scene, get the stage ready. . . ."

Just when the crimson, frosty dawn was beginning to show through the smoke from the farmstead chimneys, a horseman leaped from his rime-covered horse in front of the hut serving as regimental headquarters, and knocked furiously at the door. Ivan Ilyich opened it himself. The man handed him a missive. That very day all carts from the neighbouring farmsteads had been mobilized, and the regiment had set out on its march.

The surrounding of Tsaritsyn by the Don Army was beginning for the third time since August. This time General Mamontov had enveloped the town in a pincer movement. About thirty miles north, three of General Tatarkin's cavalry regiments broke through the front in a surprise attack and galloped up to the bank of the Volga, at the village of Dubovka.

General Postovsky's cavalry went to the attack a day later on the south, near Sarepta. The defence of Sarepta was entrusted to units of Dmitri Shelest's Iron Division. Shelest himself was no longer there. He had quarrelled with the Military Council, which had forbidden him to live on the country or to act without orders, and now, fearing arrest, had rushed off to Moscow, to complain. The Iron Division was in a ferment—some said Shelest would come back Army Commander, others, that he was arrested, and that they must march in a body on Tsaritsyn and rescue him, but the majority gave credit to the rumour that he had fled to Astrakhan, and was trying to organize a "free army" there. Something like one thousand five hundred cavalymen, abandoning the front, crossed the Volga and moved along the left bank to Astrakhan. The Iron Division was routed and General Postovsky occupied Sarepta, threatening Tsaritsyn from the south.

In anticipation of these flank attacks, the Military Council of the Tenth Army had been organizing a shock group consisting of two cavalry brigades—the Don-Stavropol Brigade and that of Semyon Budyonny. But owing to a breach in the

front they had failed to join forces, and the Don-Stavropol Brigade had to bear the whole brunt of the attack. Budyonny and his men were hastening to their aid, spurring on their horses day and night.

The Kachalin Regiment was dispatched to the place where the shock troops were assembled. For the rest of the day and, with a brief halt, the whole of the following night, the regiment marched through a frosty mist towards the murky glow on the horizon. This glow seemed to be vying with the flush of the dawn; the sun rose to the right of it, appearing for a short time between banks of cloud, suffused with coppery tints.

Telegin, Ivan Gora and Sapozhkov rode over the snowy steppe in front of an endless succession of carts carrying Red Army men, guns, and baggage. Mounted scouts loomed ahead in the distance. The two commanders and the Commissar were astonished to hear the angry rumble of artillery fire, reaching them from no great way off. Urging their horses to a trot, they soon left the regiment behind them. Then they rode up to one another, reined in their horses, and drew a map out of its case for consultation. The place to which the regiment had orders to go was still a long way off, but the sound of artillery fire showed that the front must have come nearer. They had no communications with it, either by telephone or by dispatch riders. Such uncertainty might at any moment become catastrophic.

"It's this accursed steppe, we're like beetles crawling over a tablecloth," said Ivan Gora. "We're lucky if the Cossacks haven't spotted us yet."

"You may be sure they have," said Telegin. "They have their own ways of finding things out, they've been watching us ever since we left the farmstead."

Sapozhkov, pulling his tall cap right over his brows, galloped off towards the scouts.

The front wagons, the horses panting and shaggy with sweat, had caught them up. Ivan Ilyich ordered the Red Army men who had jumped off the carts, to run back, shouting and waving to those behind to catch up with the rest and close ranks. Threading his way through the carts, Telegin caught sight of Kuzma Kuzmich, his neck swathed in rags, driving a cart in which Dasha, in a hood and a white sheepskin coat, her face as rosy and sleepy as a child's, was perched on a heap of stage decorations. Screwing up her eyes against the

glare of the snow, she was shouting something to him which the creaking of the cart and the loud talk prevented him from hearing. Then he saw Agrippina sitting with three Red Army men. She, too, was shouting, pointing with her mittened hand towards the glow in the sky. What could she want with the sky? Ivan Ilyich threw his head back. An aeroplane was clearly visible up there—a small black bird flying below a long bank of cloud, from the lower rim of which slanted hazy shafts of sunlight.

Everybody saw it now. Ivan Ilyich, striking his horse with his whip, pushed his way forward among the carts, shouting: "Disperse!" The huge Ivan Gora, standing in his stirrups, roared out: "Fire at the plane!" A cart thundered past Ivan Ilyich, on it Dasha with terrified eyes, and Kuzma Kuzmich lashing the horse with the ends of the reins. There was a ragged outburst of firing. The aeroplane banked, going behind the cloud with roaring engines, and discharging eggs from its belly—eggs which rushed whistling downwards and exploded in black clumps on the white snow.

To many of the Red Army men this was a new and horrifying experience, and several carts galloped far into the steppe. The bugle sent out a long-drawn summons to rally the scattered ranks. And after this the younger men eyed the clouds long and anxiously.

The Cossacks themselves could now be expected to appear at any moment. The carts moved axle to axle, in close formation. The tarpaulins were removed from the guns, which moved slowly forward inside an extended quadrangle. Towards sunset the outlines of a farmstead showed purple against the sky. Sapozhkov came galloping back with two scouts. He rode up to Telegin and Ivan Gora in high spirits, taking off his cap and ruffling his damp locks.

"Everything's all right," he said. "There's no one at the farmstead but women and children. The Cossacks are about four miles further on, in the next village."

"Cossacks, are there? That's fine consolation!" Ivan Gora exclaimed testily. "Where are our chaps?"

"I don't know, I tell you! They've evacuated the village, and they didn't even get to the farmstead."

"The farmstead must be occupied," said Ivan Ilyich. "But until I've got in touch with headquarters I don't intend to go a step beyond it."

They occupied the farmstead, which lay along the ridge of a flooded gully, at dusk. The men knocked on shutters, shouting menacingly: "Come on out, you there!" They entered the dark, warm huts. Most of them were empty, but in one or two they discovered a woman holding a child, or an ancient beldame, cowering and muttering behind a stove. The entire male population had fled to the village. Telegin gave orders to entrench. The street was blocked at both ends by rows of carts. Telegin had sent Sapozhkov with a handful of volunteers, while it was still light, on distant reconnaissance, in order to get in touch with the front lines by morning.

They spent an anxious night. Cossacks were not very fond of night fighting, but they were up to all sorts of ruses, and anything could be expected of them at any moment. Ivan Ilyich and Ivan Gora paced the village from end to end, making their way across the pond over the still unsafe ice. The sky was overcast and the artillery fire had died down in the northeast. A damp wind had arisen, the frost had abated somewhat, and the snow no longer crunched underfoot.

"We've walked right into a trap, a trap," boomed Ivan Gora, striding moodily at Telegin's side. "Couldn't get the regiment there. . . . It's a disgrace! They're looking for *us*, we're looking for *them*—what a muddle! And whose fault is it? Tell me that!"

"Shut up—it's nobody's fault."

"Who will be the first to be blamed? Me, of course! And quite right, too! The Commissar gets his regiment lost in the steppe! What a mess!"

A single shot rang out soundingly. Ivan Gora stopped short. The very beating of his heart was audible. Suddenly a burst of firing broke out, and as suddenly stopped. The only sound in the darkness was the voices of people starting up in their sleep and rushing out of the huts.

"The lads are jumpy," said Ivan Ilyich. "They've never been under fire before! Let's smoke!"

Just before dawn he went for a moment into the hut where he was quartered, picking his way across the legs of the sleepers, and groping for the stove. Dasha's hand felt for him in the dark and stroked his cheek, and he pressed his lips to her warm palm.

"Why aren't you asleep?"

"D'you know what I was thinking, Ivan? If we stay long at

this farmstead, we might as well do *The Robbers* in the open air, and in greatcoats. After all, the setting isn't everything. . . ."

"Of course, Dasha darling!"

"It was going so well, it would be a pity for them to lose it all."

"Quite right. I'll have a look tomorrow, perhaps there'll be some shed we can use. Go to sleep, little one."

He went out again, drawing deep breaths of damp air. After so many years of longing for happiness, Ivan Ilyich could not get used to the idea that it was now close at hand, in the low hut, on the warm stove ledge, covered with a sheepskin coat. . . .

"Can't sleep, nervous . . . but not a word of that! Only stretched out her dear hand to show she was glad to see me . . . what a marvellous woman!"

Ivan Ilyich was so moved by her having felt for him in the dark and stroked him and held her hand to his lips, that despite the chill wind his face burned. . . . Could he have been mistaken? "No, friend, all that's nonsense—none of that, now. . . . She's your friend—oh, yes! And a faithful one—yes . . . and be glad of that. . . ."

He could not forget those dark evenings in Petrograd, when, hastening home with a cake or some sweets he had with such difficulty obtained for Dasha, he had inspired her with nothing but disgust and horror . . . there must have been something in himself to evoke such feelings, and it must still be there. God, how he loved that woman, how he desired her!

Ivan Gora appeared from out of the dark, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his jacket.

"What if they get hold of Sapozhkov?"

"It's quite possible. I'll send another patrol out at sunrise."

"All that should have been done earlier, much earlier!"

Ivan Gora took one hand out of his pocket and smote himself on the forehead with his clenched fist. "You haven't justified the trust placed in you, Communist! Even if we do manage to wriggle out of this mess, I shall never forgive myself. . . . I would lead a commissar like myself round the corner of that barn, there, and bid him a long farewell."

"It's just as much my fault, as yours, Ivan Stepanovich, if it comes to that."

"No, no! Well, come on, let's have a smoke!"

Sergei Sergeyevich Sapozhkov and his five scouts roamed the steppe all night in the hope of discovering some indications that the front was somewhere in the vicinity. But the steppe remained silent and impenetrable. Lighting matches, they got their bearings with a compass. The famished horses were utterly exhausted, the one loaded with the machine gun had fallen lame and was tugging at the bridle. Sapozhkov gave the order to dismount, to unbridle the horses, and loosen the girths. They shook a few handfuls of wheat from their saddle bags into their caps, and then, backing the horses against the wind, fed them.

"Comrade Commander, I think I've discovered why we can't contact the front," said Sharigin, as ever choosing his words carefully. "They're all concentrated somewhere." (He was so cold that his lips were almost numb.) "We led our flanks into the area of hostilities, and the Cossacks have concentrated their forces—is that possible?"

"Oh, Cossacks, Cossacks, false lying offspring of the alligator! Hell and a thousand devils!" said Latugin with perfect gravity. The three young Red Army men, who had been mobilized from Cossack farmsteads, spluttered with laughter. Sharigin instantly replied:

"Jokes are not always in place, Comrade Latugin. You should learn to keep your impudence in check where serious matters are involved."

"That'll do, lads," put in Sapozhkov quietly. "No quarrelling!"

The horses jingled their bits as they crunched the wheat between their teeth. The wind whistled in the barrels of the rifles slung over the backs of the scouts.

"Stop fooling, you devil, and eat!" shouted Latugin when his horse, lifting its muzzle from the cap, began tossing its head up and down as if bowing to him.

A short time before, Sapozhkov had called for volunteers for reconnaissance mission among the Red Army men gathered around the farmstead well, and Sharigin had been the first to respond with the words: "I'll go with you." At the same time he had not been able to refrain from adding, with obvious emotion: "Don't think I'm trying to show off, Comrade Commander. But, you know, me being a Young Communist. . . ."

Latugin, who had come to the well with a team of artillery horses, and was chatting and laughing with the Red Army men, hearing this, and seeing Sharigin's red, excited face, had said to himself: "Snub-nosed devil, I'm not going to be outdone by you. . ." and had shrugged his way to Sapozhkov:

"Could you use me, Sergei Sergeyevich? I could easily run and get leave from the battery, you know. . ."

He never stopped teasing Sharigin, the whole way, much to the amusement of the Red Army men. Sharigin had called him impudent, and the Commander had reproved him. Let them! Latugin shook the remaining grains of wheat from the cap into his hand and stuffed them into his mouth.

"We must get hold of a prisoner. What's the good of roaming aimlessly over the steppe? If we had a prisoner we could find out where the enemy's front line is."

"Quite right," assented Sharigin. "A practical suggestion."

"To horse, Comrades!"

Putting on his cap again, Sapozhkov bridled his horse, grunting as he tightened the girth, and leaped into the saddle. With the onset of dawn the frost grew sharper, and the night was no longer so dark. The greenish light preceding day lit up the dull edges of the dun-coloured clouds. The men trotted on, hunched up in their saddles.

"Stop! There they are!" Latugin tugged his carbine right over his head, knocking off his cap. "Six! Seven!" Only his keen seaman's eyes could have made out the vague shapes looming in the dim green light. . . . "Not there, damn it!" he hissed to the scouts, who were riding up to him. "Over there, you can hardly make them out!"

While they were hastily lifting the machine gun from the back of the horse, the sound of hoofs became audible, and the wavering outlines of horsemen, looking enormous in the dim light, came into sight.

"Put down your guns, surrender, you blighters!" yelled Latugin savagely. He struck his horse with the muzzle of his carbine in a most unhorsemanlike way and galloped off, closely followed at the gallop by Sharigin. "Back! Back!" shouted Sapozhkov at the top of his voice. The Cossacks, evidently scouts themselves, halted for a moment, and then, turning their horses' heads, rode off. Latugin fired from the saddle several times: the horse of one of the Cossacks, who was galloping after his rapidly disappearing companions,

swerved sharply and fell heavily to the ground. Latugin and Sharigin dodged about round the man, who leaped clear. "Come here, Comrades!" called Latugin, struggling with the captive beside the fallen horse. When the rest got up to him, he was sitting astride the Cossack and twisting his arms. "He's not very big, but he's a stout fellow. . . ." The Cossack lay face down, his cheek against the snow, snorting and screwing up his eyes.

Ordering him to get up, the men shoved him, rolling him over on to his back. The Cossack uttered a stream of invectives, trying to use the most offensive language possible, as if he wanted them to kill him at once. Sapozhkov, very pale, struck him with the scabbard of his sword, shouting: "Get up!" The Cossack, raising his head, cast a wild glance at him, and staggered to his feet. He was a short fellow with sloping shoulders, and his halolike beard was full of snow.

"Hold your foul tongue, chicken-killer!" Sapozhkov shouted at him. "You are in the presence of a regimental commander—answer my questions!"

The Cossack tugged at the strap which bound his twisted arms behind his back. He turned his bearded countenance on the men confronting him, gazing from one to the other from round, tawny eyes. Suddenly he said, moistening his lips with his tongue, and addressing his words to a Red Army man whose rosy face seemed always ready to break into smiles.

"I know you. You're own nephew to Kurkin—aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Faugh! And I know *you*—you're Yakov Vasilyevich. . . ."

"Good day, Yakov Vasilyevich!" said Latugin. "Glad to meet you!", and the man with the laughing face gave a guffaw. "Bearded wonder! We've been looking for you all night. What's your regiment? What corps does it belong to?"

Sapozhkov, pushing him aside, got out the map and started questioning the prisoner. At first the Cossack answered unwillingly, but then, evidently reminding himself that time might be gained by talking—the Red swine would cool down a little and he might find a way out—he began to speak. They learned from his replies of the breach made by General Tatarkin in the front, and that the Don-Stavropol Brigade had prevented Tatarkin's forces from following up their success. He told them, also, that a fierce battle was raging at Dubovka, where both Whites and Reds were concentrating their forces.

They now had one end of the thread in their hands. It was decided to send the Cossack back to the regiment with a single convoy, the rest, not sparing their horses, to push on to Dubovka, and report the arrival of the Kachalin Regiment to the Commander in Chief. And only then it was discovered that nobody knew where Sharigin was.

"Mishka!" Latugin called out. "Have you gone to sleep with the horses?"

Latugin's horse stood there, treading on the trailing reins. From under the belly of another horse, whose head drooped on its thin neck, could be seen Sharigin's legs, bent up in a curious fashion. He was clasping the pummels of his saddle, against which his face was pressed.

Latugin took hold of his shoulders and drew him towards himself. "Mishka!" he cried anxiously. "What's the matter, kid?"

Swaying backwards, Sharigin fell heavily upon Latugin. His face was ashen. His greatcoat was soaked with blood from the chest to the ammunition belt. Latugin let him down on to the snow, bared his white stomach, and laid his hand on a deep, bleeding, wound—the result of a stab.

"It was you who ripped him with your sword, wasn't it? Oh, Yakov, Yakov!"

Pulling off his greatcoat and tunic, he tore his shirt from the collar down, and rolled it into a bandage with which he began deftly binding up Sharigin's stomach.

"He must be taken to the farmstead, Sergei Sergeyevich."

"But how...?"

"How? I'll take him myself, and drive the prisoner in front."

Sweat suddenly broke out on Sharigin's deathlike countenance, his eyes, which had rolled upwards beneath the lids, came to life, and consciousness, astonishment, and fear crept into them: what had happened to him, to break his young, strong body, which had never known a moment's illness?...

"Comrades! Friends! What am I to do?"

"Take some snow, some snow, old boy!" and Latugin plucked up a handful of snow and laid it on the sufferer's lips.

While they were seeing to Sharigin and transferring the machine gun from the lamed horse to another, it had become quite light; a wind had sprung up, the low, ragged clouds,

from which came an icy drizzle, racing before it. They were too much absorbed to notice a vast body of cavalry approaching from the south with the drifting fragments of mist.

The steppe rang with the sound of horses' hoofs. Swaying columns of horsemen passed at a trot, followed by artillery, and machine-gun carriages drawn by four horses.

Holding on to their horses' bridles, the scouts looked at them. It was too late to retreat. They had been observed, and a score or so of horsemen detached themselves from the head of the passing column and galloped up to them. Looking over his shoulder Sapozhkov saw Latugin, pale and grave, slowly drawing his sword. The Red Army man with the laughing face was absent-mindedly clicking the bolt of his rifle, his whole face puckered up as if in pain.

The foremost horseman, wearing a smartly-dented sheepskin cap and black Cossack cloak with wide shoulders, which enveloped his small horse from head to tail, shouted something, and pointed to the scouts. Sapozhkov fired, but Latugin fell on him from the saddle and clutched at his arm.

"You damned fool! Don't fire! It's our chaps!"

The galloping horsemen drew nearer and nearer. Those on the flanks spread-eagled over their horses, as they surrounded the scouts. The tall man in the Cossack cloak almost rode Sapozhkov down. Seizing him by the front of his tunic, he shook him so violently that both his feet came out of the stirrups.

"Are you blind?" he cried. "Who are you? What's your unit?"

His black eyes rolled, his moustache bristled, and he seemed to be restraining himself with difficulty from prodding the awe-struck Sapozhkov with the hilt of his sword.

"We're from the Kachalin Infantry Regiment," he replied. "We're trying to get into touch with the front."

"I don't think much of your trying, with the front right under your nose," retorted the moustached rider, cooling down, and returning his sword to its scabbard with a clatter. "Mount and come with us."

"We have a casualty, you see. . . ."

"My God! Is your whole regiment as stupid as you are? Put your wounded on a horse with that big fellow," pointing at Latugin. "And who's this hero?"

"He's our prisoner."

"Bring him here." (Sapozhkov tried to stammer out that the prisoner must be kept in the regiment.) "I haven't the patience to speak to you. The Chief of Staff of the Brigade will do that, you don't seem very quick at the uptake." Settling his cape with a movement of one shoulder, he rode off at a round trot, the horse capering beneath him and scattering the snow with gleaming hoofs. The rest galloped after him, and after them went Latugin, with Sharigin's body leaning against him, and the Cossack prisoner, his hands unbound, frowning into his spreading beard in his shame and grief.

The horsemen were astounded by the question put to them by Sergei Sergeyevich: what is this cavalry, galloping so fast in marching array, already hardly visible through the mist and rain.

"Don't you know that? Why, it's the brigade of Semyon Mikhailovich Budyonny!"

"Have you rested, Darya Dmitrevna? Why such a worried face? You've had nothing to eat since the morning? Aha! I've been doing some milking and got a whole pailful. I'd have brought you some, really I would, but the men drank it all. We crumbled some bread and gobbled it up—three of us. We fairly crammed our bellies. . . ."

Kuzma Kuzmich was fairly bursting with elation. Dasha could hardly bear to look at his face, which looked almost indecent now that his beard and whiskers had been shaved: the small, fussy chin, and the lips, so frankly naked, seemed to be asking for a covering. . . . Dasha had waked up late, when there was nobody left either in the hut or in the cowshed. A smell of thawing, and of stables hung in the air, and there were tufts of mist clinging to the reed thatches. Kuzma Kuzmich, catching sight of her from the neighbouring yard, had climbed agilely over the wattle fence and begun dancing round her, rubbing his small, grimy hands.

"In the first place, everything is all right, Darya Dmitrevna. . . . Your husband is over on that side of the pond. You were so sound asleep that you heard nothing—there's been a skirmish. The Cossacks tried to find out our strength, but we gave them such a drubbing that they took to their heels and rushed headlong back to the village. We are still digging trenches. I've been to the battery—Karl Moor hasn't come

back from reconnoitring yet. Anisya rode past on the barrel, you ought to have seen her—her mouth shut like a trap, her nose sharp, she wouldn't even speak to me. That's the summary of current events. And now you take this pail, scoop out some warm water from the copper and come and milk the cow. There's nothing so consoling to body and soul, especially for a dreamy intellectual like you, as the touch of a cow's udder."

Dasha laughed. But he continued insistently:

"Schiller's all very well, but the owners have run away from our farm, leaving their cattle unwatered, unfed, and unmilked. That's not right. Go and get a pail."

"I don't know how to milk, Kuzma Kuzmich."

"A thoroughly typical reply. You didn't know how to do anything, Darya Dmitrevna, you didn't know how to hold a needle, you almost lost your husband for good, with your not-knowing. But we'll milk that cow, I'll show you how to make milk pancakes, and fry eggs on chips. Ivan Ilyich will arrive as hungry as a wolf. And his lovely wife will hand him a frying pan with the lard hissing in it like mad. Just as he's bending over it, you'll present him with—pancakes! You'll sit opposite him and look at him with a calm smile, which will seem to him as enigmatic as the Gioconda's. That's what the wives of our Red Army commanders are like."

Kuzma Kuzmich had his way—once let him get an idea into his head, you might as well give in! Tucking up her skirt in the semidarkness of the shed, Dasha sat down beside the cow, which neither butted nor kicked. She washed the udder with warm water and began tugging at the scaly teats, following the instructions of Kuzma Kuzmich, who squatted down behind her. She was afraid the cow's teats would come off, but he urged her over and over again: "Pull harder—don't be afraid." The broad-flanked cow turned its head, enveloping Dasha in the noisy exhalation of its warm, good breath. The thin streams of milk, redolent of infancy, rang on the bottom of the pail. This was that inarticulate "lower" world, the "good" world, of which Dasha had hitherto been quite unaware. She said this to Kuzma Kuzmich in a whisper, and his answer came from behind her, also in a whisper:

"Only mind you don't tell anybody about it—they'd only laugh. Darya Dmitrevna has discovered a mystic world in the cowshed, they'd say! Are your fingers tired?"

"Awfully!"

"Let me!..." (He squatted down in her place.) "This is the way—like this. Oh my, oh my—the Russian intellectuals! Looking for eternal truths and finding a cow..."

"And what about you?"

"Me?"

In his indignation he let go of the cow's udder.

"Sitting beside a cow and philosophizing."

"Look here, ducky, you'd better not get into an argument with an unfrocked priest."

He took the pail and they both went out of the shed to the hut. Kuzma Kuzmich began slicing splinters from a piece of wood.

"Philosophizing is mere mental browsing. Johann Georg Hamann, nicknamed the Northern Magician, declared: 'Our own existence and the existence of external objects are quite incapable of proof, and demand nothing but belief....' Does that mean that where there is no belief there is no external world? No you and no me? And this splinter doesn't really exist? Are we going to fry eggs on nothing?"

He placed the splinters in the stove, scraping up a few embers and blowing on them.

"The philosophy of life is another matter, Darya Dmitrevna. Study life, learn to know it, to possess it.... Without the intervention of the higher mental powers life will take an evil course. My existence is an undoubted fact and of extreme importance to myself. And since I am gregarious and inquisitive, I want to see and understand everything. It won't be long before I understand quite a lot about what is going on around us, and what is happening to us, for all these events are no mere spontaneous manifestations, but the products of reason. I can't get at our Commissar. And anyhow he's not the one I want to talk to—I want to talk to that man who wears ordinary clothes, and has, oh, such a head! (You know who I mean.) If I could get an hour with that one...! Run out into the yard, Darya Dmitrevna; there's a barn at the far end, I noticed it yesterday, and took the precaution of breaking the lock. Get a little flour—two or three handfuls...."

Breakfast was ready. But instead of Ivan Ilyich, whom Dasha expected to appear any minute, a Red Army man carrying a rifle and a bulging cartridge pouch burst into the hut.

"The Commander says you're to harness the horse and load the cart . . . pack up all your stuff." His nostrils quivered, and he pushed back his cap, holding his rifle as he approached the stove. Gathering up from the frying pan as many pancakes as he could hold, he sniffed apologetically and withdrew. But Dasha halted him with a shout:

"What's happened, Comrade?"

"Don't you know? Look out of the window, and you'll see," he replied.

At that moment, so near that it seemed to be in the very yard, there was an explosion which blew the panes right out of the two tiny windows.

The plans for the December offensive against Tsaritsyn had been worked out by military experts from Denikin's headquarters. A certain Baron Wrangel, one of Denikin's youngest generals, had pointed out how enormously important it was that this town should be seized. The plans were approved by Ataman Krasnov. A division under the command of Mai-Mayevsky, one of those which had taken part in the victory over the Reds in the North Caucasus, was sent, with reinforcements from the best fighting units from Kornilov's, Markov's, and Drozdovsky's divisions, to the aid of the Don Army. Mai-Mayevsky marched through the Donbas to cover the rear of the Don Army, which was exposed to attacks from the Ukraine in the west, and on its northern front had nothing but a fairly strong maintaining force. Fifty thousand picked men from the Don Army were marching on Tsaritsyn.

Meanwhile plans for a counteroffensive were also being worked out at the General Headquarters of the Red Armies of the Republic. The Eighth and Ninth Red Armies, which were then on the northern boundary of the Don district, were to invade its interior along both banks of the Don, driving Krasnov's White Cossacks on to the bayonets of the Tenth Army, while gradually annihilating the Don Army in the Tsaritsyn steppe. After routing the enemy's forces, the Red Armies, making a rightabout turn, were to move west to the Dnieper and clear the Ukraine of Petlura's men.

But those responsible for drawing up the Red Army plan of campaign had made no allowance for the highly impor-

tant fact that the lines and circles, the network of signs and figures marked on tactical maps, indicated points where a class struggle was being waged according to its own laws and potentialities. And these lines and dots were sharply differentiated in their significance: some would contribute fresh strength to Red regiments, brigades and divisions, others would only serve to weaken them.

The plans drawn up by general headquarters dispatched the Red Armies in directions not dictated by the tactics of civil war. Their movements from the north to the southeast, across the Don, Khoper and Medveditsa, through Cossack villages in which a hostile spirit prevailed, weakened the forces of the offensive, slowing it down and thereby enabling the enemy to manoeuvre and reorganize.

Such were the next furtive measures dictated by secret treachery in the very heart of the Supreme Military Council of the Republic, which passed for execution the erroneous plan drawn up at general headquarters. The error, at first glance negligible, in six months' time grew into a serious menace.

The December counteroffensive of the Red Armies had begun. It started well to the east of the Donbas, where the workers in industrial and mining districts were only waiting for the arrival of the Red Army to start armed risings. But Mayevsky's division had now begun to scour the district from the south with ramrods and gibbets. The right flank of the Red offensive was exposed, and the offensive came to a standstill. For the third time since August the Tenth Army bore the whole brunt of the blow.

The enemy, numerically superior, better equipped, and better fed, was in splendid trim for an offensive. The forces were too unequally matched. Tsaritsyn sent its last reinforcements to the front, all that were left—five thousand workers. The creative spirit of the revolution hurled itself into the breach.

In the year 1792 the French people, starving, barefoot, armed with home-made pikes, invented hurricane artillery fire to conquer the trained forces of the European coalition, and, contrary to all the rules of warfare, met the famous *carrés* of the Emperor Friedrich with a mass infantry attack.

The Russian people created new forms for the organization of cavalry units. An example of these was the brigade of

Semyon Budyonny, from the Šalsk steppe. Its intrepidity was not its only quality. White Cossacks could also cleave a rider to the saddle. The real strength of Budyonny's brigade lay in the loyalty and discipline of all its members—from the standard-bearer with his fierce moustache, to the bearded ancient guarding the baggage wagons. Each squadron and troop was formed of recruits from the same village. Warriors who had caught grasshoppers together in the steppe as boys, now rode side by side—sons and nephews in the ranks, fathers and uncles on the baggage carts. From the very first day when Semyon Budyonny had ridden out of the village of Platovskaya at the head of a three-hundred-strong cavalry detachment up till the present moment, there had not been a single case of desertion.... Where was a deserter to go? Certainly not back to his village or farm, for that would have meant disgrace and public condemnation.

According to an unwritten law not included in regulations, there were two courts in the brigade—the official tribunal and unofficial trials. Offenders—whether they had shown the white feather in battle, disobeyed orders, or merely stretched out a hand for another man's property, came before the tribunal. But in special cases, in addition to the tribunal the soldiers themselves tried a transgressor, gathering somewhere out of sight in the dusk for this purpose. It sometimes happened that the tribunal, taking into consideration this or that extenuating circumstance, acquitted the accused, while the comradely trial, more severe, passed their own sentence, and there was no one from whom to enquire of the fate of a man who disappeared.

The battle order of the brigade was also organized in a new way, and here again no mention of its rules was to be found in field regulations. A squadron drew up for attack in double deployment. The front one consisted of experienced strong-armed swordsmen, usually cavalymen from the old army; such was the power of their thrusts that it was said an enemy horse would be seen galloping away with only the lower half of its rider in the saddle. After these galloped the crack shots, armed with revolvers and carbines, each one acting as a protection for the man in front of him. The front line, covered by the fire of their comrades behind, rushed, fearless, without a backward glance, to plunge their swords into the bodies of the foe, and there had never been an in-

stance of hostile cavalry, even when double or treble the superior, numerically, being able to endure the concentrated attack of the Budyonny men, an attack forged into a concerted whole from separate links, each a fully conscious unit.

The farmstead was on fire in several places. Smoke rolled upwards amidst the huddle of roofs, flames shot out, sending sparks and fragments of burning straw towards the drifting, low-lying clouds. Pigeons flew in circles and fell into the flames. The cattle lowed in the byres. A breed bull got free, breaking down the wattle fence, and rushing into the street with loud bellows. Women dashed out of burning huts with children in their arms, seeking a place of shelter. The Cossack artillery fired relentlessly from the ambush of mounds and hillocks just beyond the village.

About noon the first lines of Cossack soldiers began to be visible as little black specks at regular intervals—their intention was to surround the burning farmstead and drive into its flames the men of the Kachalin Regiment, entrenched in their hastily made dugouts. The lines of trenches began from the smithy, which stood at one end of the farmstead, extended along the bank of the pond (where the ice had been broken with hand grenades), and turned towards the windmill, standing on a mound.

Telegin and Ivan Gora were riding along the trench lines, closely followed by the Commissar's orderly, Agrippina, who wore her smartly dented sheepskin cap jauntily cocked, a knack she had learned from the Cossacks. They stopped here and there—now beside a gun squad, now next to a platoon, the men crouching waist-high in the narrow ditch beneath the drizzle. Ivan Ilyich was fresh-coloured and bright-eyed, and even Ivan Gora, haggard and sallow from the experiences of the night, had calmed down now that the situation had become clear. Telegin, who kept righting himself in the saddle, and passing a gloved hand over his lips, as if to wipe the smile from them, timed his remarks to the spells of silence between explosions:

"Comrades," he said, "we have a chance to inflict serious losses on the enemy. Fire without panic, calmly choose your man and use only one bullet on him—this is the sort of firing

the Commissar and I expect from you. When you hear the command for a bayonet charge, go to it all together, with spirit . . . I order you not to retreat under any circumstances."

Commissar Ivan Gora threw back his head and shouted:

"Long live Comrade Lenin! Down with world capitalism!"

And they rode off to the next group of soldiers. Having made the rounds, they dismounted in front of the windmill. By this time the scouts had ascertained that big Cossack reinforcements had entered the village during the night. The recklessness of their attack made it obvious that the Kachalin Regiment, by turning up at the farmstead, had caught them unawares, while engaged upon some other task, and that they had then decided to wipe out the Reds with one smashing blow.

The wind whistled under the roof of the mill, the wooden gears creaked, and inside there was a reassuringly home-like smell of mice and flour. Ivan Gora, sighing heavily, kept leaning out of a gap made by missing boards to see if there was any sign of Sergei Sergeyevich to the east, in the brown steppe. Telegin, who was below shouting orders into the field telephone, rushed up the steep stairs.

"We are repeating the Tsaritsyn operation!" he shouted exultantly, lifting his field glasses to his eyes.

"To hell with your 'operations'—we're surrounded like a flock of sheep. . . . They've killed him, I tell you, it's going on for two already."

"It's not so easy to kill Sergei Sergeyevich!"

"What are you so damned cheerful about?"

"One should always fight cheerfully, Ivan Stepanovich!"

The smoke from straw burning on threshing floors spread low over the ground, moving in the direction of the Cossacks. Isolated figures could now be made out, advancing in short runs. The front lines of the Reds fell back on the trenches, firing as they retreated. A hush fell upon the entire line of the Kachalin Regiment, ranged around the burning farmstead in the shape of an irregular horseshoe.

"Ha! They're lying down!" cried Telegin. "They couldn't take it, the greenhorns! Look, look; the lines are lying down. . . . For Christ's sake, Ivan Stepanovich, run and tell them, so's they'll understand, not to fire. . . . Not a shot to be fired without my orders!"

"The Commissar!" cried Baikov, mock alarm in his voice. "Every man to his place!"

The First Gun Squad, consisting of Baikov, Zaduviter, Gagin and Anisya, an ammunition carrier, all got to their feet and took their places. Ivan Gora appeared from behind the charred wall of a mud hut, Agrippina at his heels. They were on their way to the squad covering the battery. Ivan Gora began speaking to the Red Army men. Agrippina, taut as a whip, stood at attention beside him, a revolver pointing downward in her hand.

"... without special orders—not a single shot to be fired!" thundered out Ivan Gora insistently. "Comrades, I warn you, anyone disobeying orders will be shot down on the spot."

Baikov shook his beard, hoary with raindrops:

"Look out for that lass with the revolver, brothers!" he said. "She'll put a bullet through you without turning a hair!"

"Why do you laugh at her?" retorted Anisya. "Agrippina knows what she's about."

Ivan Gora turned towards the gun, looking so grave that the whole crew fell silent and still. Agrippina followed at her husband's heels as if she were tied to him. Gun Number One stood on a remarkable contraption of loosely knocked-together boards and cart wheels, the ground beneath it strewn with saws, hatchets and woodshavings. Ivan Gora gazed at the monster, blinking.

"What is this?" he asked at last.

"Our own invention, Comrade Commissar," answered Baikov. "Something like a ship's rotary turret."

"And what are the cart wheels for?"

"To make it rotate quicker. A handy little thing...."

"I see, I see," and Ivan Gora went on, Agrippina in his wake. Baikov winked in her direction:

"She and I are in the same dramatic circle, Comrades, but I'm more afraid of her than I am of the Commissar.... Her eyes are as round as a mouse's, and there's no pity in them.... Oh, wenches, wenches, what are we fighting for?"

"I took them to him, Darya Dmitrevna.... They wouldn't let me into the mill.... He nodded to me from above: 'Did Dashenka really make them herself?' he asked. I told him:

'Yes, she did—too bad they're cold, though.' He said: 'I like cold pancakes best of all.... Give her a thousand kisses from me....'

"You're making it all up."

"No, I'm not, honestly.... Have you heard about the goings-on? Our Ivanov, you know, the doctor, was so terrified, the poor sap, vomiting, diarrhoea and all that... the Commissar was furious. 'His nerves need strengthening,' he said, and made them undress him and pour cold water from the well over him.... Can you hear him?—that's the third bucket he's getting. It's a scream! And, you know, I'm a coward myself, Darya Dmitrevna."

Dasha paced up and down the hut from door to window like a caged animal. Material for dressing and bandaging was now laid out in the room, which already smelt of carbolic and iodoform. Kuzma Kuzmich buzzed round her.

"I keep having a dream—the same one almost every night: I have a rifle in my hand, and my heart is beating like mad, and I fire, I press the trigger with all my might, I put my very soul into that damned gun.... And instead of shooting properly, the trigger moves ever so slowly, and smoke comes ever so faintly out of the barrel, and the person I'm shooting at ... I never see his face ... comes nearer and nearer and gets bigger and bigger. ... Faugh! It's horrible!"

"Why is everything so quiet?" asked Dasha, cracking the joints of her fingers and coming to a halt at the window. The early dusk was beginning to fall... the fires had burned themselves out. No more exploding shells, with their hair-raising whistling approach could be heard. The rifle firing had stopped too. The Cossack lines were crawling forward until they almost surrounded the farmstead. Dasha turned from the window and resumed her pacing up and down.

"There'll be lots of wounded," she said. "How shall we cope with them?"

"The Commissar is sending Agrippina, she'll be a great help. I asked him for Anisya, too: 'It isn't right for her to be at the gun, it's just some romantic idea of hers to stand by the gun,' I said. But what d'you make of this dream of mine?"

"Tell me the truth—is Ivan Ilyich all right? Is everything all right?"

"He leaned down to me through a hole in the roof—he was smiling from ear to ear. He's absolutely confident of victory...."

"Oh!" Dasha gave a shake of her head. She must force herself not to think of those thousands of men creeping forward like wild beasts. One couldn't understand it, anyhow.... She made a mighty effort to drag her imagination, like some fairy-tale monster on a string, back to the present moment, to those small objects laid out on the table—bandages, phials, surgical instruments.... Too bad there was so little iodine! Her imagination obeyed her docilely, but next minute it escaped through invisible loopholes and was at it again, widening Dasha's eyes into two great lakes.... Why, oh, why did these people have to kill all who were innocent, good, dear? What could be more terrible than hatred? Hatred was pressing up to her, surrounding her, ruthless, ever on the alert, ready to thrust a bayonet into her, a bayonet which she would grasp convulsively.

"No, no—this won't do," said Dasha, and the wild gaze of her wide-open eyes frightened Kuzma Kuzmich. "What are you staring at me for? I feel sick, see? Just like our doctor. I can't stand hatred.... The result of gentle upbringing? You can call it that, if you like!"

She moved the bottles and packets aimlessly on the table.

"And I don't understand why you start telling me some dream, either."

"Aha, Darya Dmitrevna! The dream has come true! There is a hatred which purges like love... a hatred like the morning star on a lofty brow. And there is a hatred that is rooted in the belly, a bestial, stony hatred, and that's the sort you're afraid of. I was afraid of it too, back in 1914. They say some Russians were abroad at the time of mobilization, and rushed to catch the last train.... German guards were banging the doors of railway carriages on the tiny hands of little children.... And this is what my dream means—I wouldn't tell the Commissar about it, or anybody but you, and I can only tell you at a moment like this. I am powerless, my earthly pilgrimage is over...." Quite unexpectedly, he gave a sob. "My gun will not fire, it can only squeak."

"I hate them!" cried Dasha suddenly, and began smiting her breast with bunched fingers. "I've seen them, I know their faces: the eyes of would-be murderers, their cheeks

pimplly with lust, their sagging chins. . . . Beasts! Stupid, ignorant. . . . There is no place for such on the earth!"

"Easy there, Darya Dmitrevna! Let's see if the water in the copper has boiled."

Dasha stepped rapidly up to the window—in the blue dusk Red Army men, their rifles atilt as for the attack, were running past, crouching. She could even make out their faces, and the lines of strain graven on them. One of them stumbled and almost fell, but ran on again, then, waving his arms in the attempt to recover his balance, half turned, baring his teeth.

A rocket rose over the steppe, scattering poison-green sparks. Descending slowly, they lit up the grey backs huddled in the trenches, and, quite near—less than five hundred yards away—the figures of foot Cossacks just beginning to rise to their feet. One of them brandished his sword over his head as he ran. The lights from the rocket went out, one by one, and from pitch-darkness of the moment which ensued there rose a shout of "hurrah!", increasing in volume like the wind before a storm.

Telegin took off his cap and passed his hand over his damp hair. Everything that could have been thought of, anticipated, and carried out, had been done. Now the psychology of battle must begin. The enemy's numerical strength was probably four times that of the Reds, judging by the massed reserves which Telegin had been able to descry through his field glasses. In his eagerness to see he thrust his head and shoulders out of the hole in the roof. The farmstead was suddenly ringed with the blaze of rifle firing. Telegin's head seemed to be going round. . . . People were clustering hither and thither, making for the trenches. . . . Ivan Ilyich began looking for his cap: "A shame to lose a fine cap like that." Next moment he was on level ground, dashing from the mound to the trenches.

The first Cossack attack had died down almost everywhere; the only place where it was still raging was, as Ivan Ilyich had supposed, around the smithy. The sounds of an appalling fray, accompanied by wild shrieks and the roar of hand grenades, came from there. Ivan Ilyich reached the clay wall of the byre, where there should have been reserves. But there was no one there, the Red Army men, unable to restrain themselves, had taken the law into their own hands

and rushed to help things out at the smithy. And, Ivan Gora, bent beneath the weight of a sack of hand grenades, was running towards the smithy too.

"Commissar!" shouted Ivan Ilyich. "What's all this? Utter disorder! It can't be allowed!"

Ivan Gora merely stuck out a ferocious-looking nose at him, from beneath the sack. A little further on Ivan Ilyich caught sight of Dasha, just going through the gate, helping a hobbling soldier along. Ivan Ilyich halted, raising his hand with the fingers spread out. "Oh, yes," he said aloud. "That's what I came for..." and turning he ran back to the battery.

"Is all well at the battery?"

"Couldn't be better! Greetings, Ivan Ilyich!"

"Shrapnel, Comrades! Fire on the reserves!"

Climbing up on to a nearby roof, Ivan Ilyich glued his eyes to his field glasses. The reserves he had spotted a short while ago from the mill were approaching in dense masses.

"Running fire!" he shouted from his vantage point.

Bursts of shrapnel shot up in rapid succession through the murky dusk. The lines of the attackers wavered, but still came on. The shrapnel burst lower and lower over their heads, but the lines still came on. A rocket flew skywards and hung like a hydra-headed, fiery serpent over the heads of the tin soldiers, as if to light up their gallant advance and hold out promises to them: "Go it, brothers—today you shall pick the bones of the Bolsheviks!" But it had barely died down, when there leaped skyward, on the right, from the east, three more rockets, one after another, which descended in red lights, dim and sinister, all over the sky.

"Reply with three red rockets in succession!" cried Telegin.

Budyonny and his men, having marched up in the dusk along the flat bed of a gully, flung themselves on the left wing of the attackers so suddenly and furiously, that the lines of the Cossack infantry were crushed and routed in the space of a minute, and then began the most terrible thing that can happen to infantry in an encounter with cavalry—the thing from which there can be no escape—the pursuit of fleeing foot soldiers by mounted swordsmen. The lights of the rockets rising over the farmstead illuminated the whole

steppe, where there was now nothing but death from the whistling blades. Men threw down their rifles as they ran, covering their heads with their hands, but the black shadows cast by horses and riders overtook them, and the Budyonny horsemen, rising flexibly in their stirrups and, leaning sideways, slashed from the shoulder—and down rolled the Cossack bodies, right under the horses' hoofs.

When Budyonny saw that the Cossack forces were routed and were running all over the field, he reined in his horse, and shouted, brandishing his sabre: "After me!", and turning, galloped up to the farmstead at the head of fifty or so riders who had answered his summons. He rode a spirited horse. Semyon Mikhailovich galloped, leaning back in his saddle, letting his sabre hang down to give his arm a rest, his silvery sheepskin cap pushed well back to allow the breeze to play on his perspiring brow. His companions had to spur their horses to keep up with him. They galloped past the pond, where the falling stars of the rockets were reflected in open patches among the ice. Some men rushed out of the horsemen's way, throwing themselves to the ground. Taking no notice of them, Budyonny pointed with his sabre towards the smithy, where the men of the Kachalin Regiment were still locked in battle with the Cossacks; first one side, then the other made bayonet charges, retreated, and threw themselves on the ground, over and over again.

Budyonny's troop spread out in deploy formation, and, their bridles held slackly, their eyes on the silvery cap bobbing up and down in front of them, rushed upon the foot Cossacks from their vantage point above the pond. Neither machine-gun fire, rifle shots, nor fixed bayonets could stop the onrush of the snorting horses. All who got within reach of a sabre were cut down. Semyon Mikhailovich did not rein in his horse until he reached the farmstead.

Telegin hurried up to him, but Semyon Mikhailovich did not at once reply to his greeting. He wiped his blade with a handkerchief, flung the handkerchief away, and returned the great sword with the bronze hilt to its sheath, before, his hand raised in a stiff salute, he said:

"Good day, Comrade, and who may you be? Commander of the regiment? I am Brigade Commander Budyonny, in command of the group. These are my orders: to leave one company behind to protect the baggage carts and the

wounded, and to proceed immediately to the village with the rest of your forces and with the artillery, to occupy it and clear it of White Cossacks."

"Very good, Comrade! It shall be done."

"One moment, Comrade. . . ."

Leaping from the saddle, he thrust his fingers beneath the saddle girth, slapping at the muzzle of the horse, which was trying to seize his cuff in its teeth. Then he gave Ivan Ilyich his hand.

"Have you had many losses?"

"Oh, no!"

"That's good. So you could have held out with your own forces even if we hadn't come?"

"We'd have held out. Why not? We have plenty of munitions."

"That's good. You can go."

"I don't feel any more pain in my stomach, Anisya Konstantinovna. I can't even feel where my stomach is. How badly that's constructed—the most important bit of machinery in us, and quite unprotected. . . . The blade went no deeper than an inch, and yet it worked such devastation. . . . Such devastation . . . give me something to drink. . . ."

Anisya was seated, exhausted and silent, at his bedside. The hospital had been moved to the village, and set up in a two-storied brick-built house. There were only lightly wounded cases in it, and patients who could not be moved, all the rest had been evacuated a few days before to Tsaritsyn. Sharigin was dying. He was so unwilling to die, and clung so piteously to life, that Anisya was quite worn out. She had given up trying to console him, and could only sit by his bedside and let him talk.

Now she rose to scoop him a mug of water from the pail, and give him a drink. His face was burning. His great eyes, blue as a baby's, followed Anisya's every movement. She was in woman's clothes and a surgeon's smock. Her golden hair, which had so haunted his dreams, was braided and bound round her head. He was terrified that she would leave him, for then there would be nothing left for him to do but bury his head in the pillow, clench his teeth and listen to the uneven hammering of his pulse in the temples. He talked

incessantly. His thoughts rose and sank, like the flame of an expiring wick—now licking the edges of the saucer, flaring up and shedding a brilliant light, now sinking and flickering.

"You weren't a bit pretty then, Anisya Konstantinovna, and you seemed twice as old. . . . You would prop your cheek on your hand and stare at nothing, your eyes dark with grief. . . . I'm not one to pity, though, I've shaken off all that. Tender-hearted people are the most callous of all, really. One can only feel pity once in one's life. . . . That's all! Then switch it off. You must lay your heart on the anvil, throw it back on to the burning coals, and put it under the sledge hammer again. . . . That's what Young Communists should be like. I called a secret meeting on the steamer that time, and told the comrades it would be unworthy of the champions of the revolution to touch you. . . . and Latugin said something about kitchen-maids. . . . Oh, that Latugin! That's not the sort of thing you need, Anisya Konstantinovna. . . . The revolution set you on your feet, you blossomed out into beauty, but not for him, was it? That's a blind alley. This matter must be brought up. . . . We shall have to fight for this matter. . . ."

His flame licked the rim of his life, measured the coming darkness, and sank. Sharigin passed his dry tongue over his lips. Anisya held the mug for him to drink, and he started talking again:

"I know what I'm dying for, I have no doubts on that score. But I should like to think you'll remember me. . . . I'm from Petrograd, Vasilyevsky Island. My Dad is a carpenter. I went to a trade school and worked for my Dad. He planed, I planed, he planed, I planed. We both of us kept our mouths shut. . . . Then I went to work at the Baltic Ship-building Wharves. There I discovered the most important thing of all—the thing I live for. . . . My thoughts were feverish, my impatience burned in me. I was led on to higher things, and I could no longer bear to remain on a lower level for a single hour. Then came the war, I was called up to the navy, and all I could do was gnash my teeth with rage. Can't you understand, Anisya Konstantinovna? I had seen a living man, a man we had conceived, created, fought for. . . . How could I let you roam the earth any more, oppressed and melancholy? What was the revolution for, then? That would have been wrong. You've got to become an actress. . . . Every evening I hung about that shed, looking

and listening! In the name of God. . . . In the name of all the saints. . . . Forsaken! Forsaken! Whole armies will be carried away by your acting. The civil war will come to an end one day, and you will become a famous actress. That's your path in life. You mustn't be weak. He'll sing to you, but don't listen to him, Anisya Konstantinovna. I'm trying to convince you, Anisya Konstantinovna, that you have no right to a personal life. Don't turn your head away, my dear. I'll have a rest and try and gather my thoughts, there's something else I wanted to say. Something I've forgotten, some very important argument. . . ."

His head tossed on the pillow, and then he was quiet for such a long time that Anisya bent low over him. The iris could not be seen between the half-closed lids. It was not his talk, but the eyes rolling in despair which went to Anisya's heart. Suddenly she understood all that he had been trying to express in vague, feverish words. Those two little ones must have called to her like that, terrified by the flames raging around the hollow dung heap where they had crouched so close to one another. It was the first time Anisya had allowed herself to think of their childish faces, she had always been afraid, but now they floated before her as if alive: Petrushka, the four-year old, and the little Anyuta-curly-headed, chubby laughing faces, with button noses. . . . And now there was another, a third, calling to her. She would bid this one farewell, she would go with him to the end.

Anisya softly smoothed his matted hair. His eyelashes quivered, and she noticed bluish patches starting out on his temples. . . .

* XIV *

Every evening Commander in Chief Denikin played *vint* in the apartment of Ekaterina Alexeyevna Kvashnina, a distant relation on his mother's side. The habit had begun as far back as the end of the previous century, when Anton Ivanovich, then a student of the General Staff Academy, had taken a room in Ekaterina Alexeyevna's home, which was on the Fifth Line, Vasilyevsky Island, a well-kept apartment on the ground floor, run according to the traditions of old St. Petersburg. Of the four who had always played together in those

days, only they two had survived, both driven by the hard mandate of destiny to Ekaterinodar, where Anton Ivanovich had, by God's will, become head of the White armed forces, and Ekaterina Alexeyevna, who had fled from Petersburg early in 1918, was living quietly with her daughter, Ekaterina Alexeyevna the younger.

The Commander in Chief had more than once proffered aid to her, under various pretexts, but she always replied: "Do not let that come between us, Anton Ivanovich, money spoils friendly relations." She supported herself and her daughter by correcting proofs for the Information Agency at home, and they still kept a few valuables against a rainy day.

Friday evenings were sacred, and nobody, not even General Romanovsky, the Chief of Staff, ever attempted to get the Commander in Chief away from the traditional game of *vint*. The one-horse shay with the raised leather hood drew up precisely at eight p.m. in front of the gates of the modest wooden house, situated in a remote section of the town, bordering on the steppe. The Commander in Chief, ordering the coachman, a bearded fellow whose chest was almost covered with Orders of St. George, to come for him at midnight, walked slowly up to the inner gate and ascended the steps of the porch, where the door seemed to open to him of itself.

The detectives sent to the house every Friday by the Chief of the Intelligence Service, did their best to keep out of the Commander in Chief's sight. One, seated astride the roof, hid behind a kitchen chimney, another lurked behind the ancient Lombardy poplars on the other side of the street, and two others concealed themselves behind the rubbish heap in the yard. Like all military men, Denikin could not abide detectives. One evening, his cards in his hand, he held up the game to relate a story showing the late tsar's attitude to this unpleasant necessity: Nikolai II was fond of taking solitary walks in the park at Tsarskoye Selo. Detectives were posted from the morning behind flower beds and bushes along the paths where the tsar might choose to walk. In the winter they were sometimes snowed up and became quite invisible. One day, as he was strolling along, he heard a hoarse voice behind a bush exclaim: "Number Seven passing." Nikolai was excessively vexed that *he* should be known among the detectives as "Number Seven," and dismissed the Chief of the Secret Service, after which he was renamed "Number One".

On entering the tiny hallway, lit by a single candle, Denikin would remove his leather overshoes with the brass-tipped heels, take off his wide, red-lined overcoat of army cloth (no one was ever allowed to help him), smooth down his thinning hair, which had a leaden tint and was brushed back from his forehead, and advance to bend over Ekaterina Alexeyevna's hand. He would take the frail, lovely hand of Ekaterina Alexeyevna the younger between his own, stroke it gently, and bid a brief, quiet "Good evening, gentlemen!" to the other two partners—his adjutant Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky, and Vasili Vasilyevich Strupe, former departmental head in some ministry, a delightful person, and an old Petersburg dweller.

The table was set up in readiness in the drawing room, with two candles and a fan of cards on its green baize top. Even the little pieces of chalk and the brushes, round and short-bristled, used for cleaning the baize, were traditional, being just like those used in the happy years on Vasilyevsky Island.

Ekaterina Alexeyevna, in her worn black dress, cheerful as ever, waddled up to the table on her short legs. She was a stumpy woman, excessively stout from the waist down. She had a round, laughing face, a big mouth, and a quaint, but reassuring lisp. She sat with her feet on a footstool, and the old bentwood chair creaked beneath her incessant fidgeting. Before drawing a card to see who her partner was to be, she would guess, and it invariably happened that her partner was the Commander in Chief. Clapping her plump hands playfully in front of her nose, she would exclaim:

"You see, I guessed right, gentlemen! Katya, Anton Ivanovich and I are partners again. . . ."

"Excellent!" Vasili Vasilyevich Strupe would reply in sepulchral tones, and taking his seat he would pick up a bit of chalk and one of the little brushes.

Vasili Vasilyevich, an imperturbable, well-informed and witty sceptic, whose stern, cadaverous face made him look older than his years, was an extremely dangerous opponent at cards, and, like all Petersburgians, his attitude to *vint* was one of becoming gravity.

"Excellent!" he would repeat, "as the titular counsellor said, when he had to discard all his trumps," and his well-

kept hands with the tough fingernails would begin rapidly shuffling the cards.

The fourth partner, Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky, was also, despite his youth, a strong *vint* player. His duties as an adjutant consisted in this occupation, and in the fulfilment of certain of the Commander in Chief's personal requirements. There were other people, of a more modern stamp, for executive work. Like all the Lobanov-Rostovskys, the prince was exceedingly plain, with a long, almost bald cranium, and a majestic brow topping insignificant features. If one overlooked his only defect—a habit of fidgeting with his long legs under the table as if he were in a hurry to “go somewhere”—the prince was exceedingly well bred. He was never known to express a personal opinion, and if questioned about anything would reply with some inconsequent nonsense, well aware that nobody would address him about anything serious. For the rest, he was courteous without being servile and had shown courage in battle during the summer, until wounded and discharged.

They played as if performing sacred rites. Neither politics nor the war was discussed in this house during these hours. Nothing was heard but the words “diamonds . . . hearts. . . . No trumps . . . two no trumps. . . .” The candles spluttered. Smoke rose from a cigarette placed on the rim of a glass ashtray. And at last:

“Well, Ekaterina Alexeyevna, shall we give up the game?”

“It seems such a pity, Anton Ivanovich. . . .”

Ekaterina Alexeyevna the younger sat nearby on the plush-covered sofa, knitting and smiling, without raising her head. Her eyes, complexion, and hair, were almost colourless, but the curve of her soft neck and her beautiful hands spoke of an eternally unsatisfied thirst for caresses. Ekaterina Alexeyevna, who was extremely susceptible, was over twenty-five, and all her love affairs had ended unhappily: one young man, bidding a hasty farewell, had to go to the front, a second turned out to be in love with another woman, and told her so, ruthlessly. And now she was in love with the ugly but oh so nice Lobanov-Rostovsky. Half in jest, he paid court to her, thus affording pleasure to the Commander in Chief, who regarded Ekaterina Alexeyevna almost as his daughter. She dreamed, in her old-world way, that he would one day forget his cigarette case, and the next morning, while Eka-

terina Alexeyevna the elder was out, would appear at the window of the little house, on horseback, and come in, his spurs jingling, greeting her (she would be in her black woollen dress with white collar and cuffs), and apologizing . . . and then he would stop short in the middle of one of his funny stories . . . he had caught sight of her face, and understood all. They would go into the drawing room, both agitated. . . . Suddenly he would take her by both arms, just above the elbow, and draw her to him: "I never knew you till now," he would say with feeling. "I never knew, you are quite different—so exquisite. . . ." Beyond this point the flight of her imagination never went. . . . Ekaterina Alexeyevna knitted and smiled on, never raising her eyes to the prince's face, as he sat between the two candles. It was enough for her that he was there, and that she could smell the aroma of his good tobacco. . . .

Such was the tiny world, the fragment of old Russia, in which Commander in Chief Denikin took refuge on Fridays from his heavy cares.

This particular Friday the Commander in Chief, contrary to custom, arrived late, and seemed preoccupied and somewhat absent-minded. While removing his overshoes he stepped on the paw of a cat prowling around his feet, and the animal mewed so hideously that Lobanov-Rostovsky seized it and carried it off to the kitchen. Ekaterina Alexeyevna the elder laughed. Vasili Vasilyevich said: "Cats are an awful nuisance." Everyone was waiting for Denikin to come into the drawing room, but he hung up his greatcoat thoughtfully and stood there plucking at his wedge-shaped, greying beard. The faces of all now turned grave, and an anxious pause ensued, until the prince, returning to the drawing room, reported that the cat was uninjured. . . .

"Aha!" said Denikin, "that's good. . . . Don't let us waste any time."

He played worse than usual, playing the wrong cards, and continually looking towards the windows, although they were shuttered. Throwing a coat over her shoulders, Ekaterina Alexeyevna the younger rose quietly and went out to make sure the detectives were at their posts. The one behind the chimney on the roof, where the piercing wind whistled,

and, higher up, the turgid half-moon plunged heavily into the clouds, called out, his teeth chattering:

"For Christ's sake bring me a drop of vodka, lady!"

About ten o'clock a car drove up to the house. The Commander in Chief laid his cards on the table, and a gleam appeared in his watchful eyes. General Romanovsky, tall, fresh-coloured, supercilious, entered. He wore an officer's greatcoat, over the front of which the ends of his thrown-back Cossack hood were crossed. Taking off his cap he addressed a bow to the company, his spurs jingling with a dry sound.

"I've come for you, Anton Ivanovich!"

"Well—have they done it?"

"Yes, Anton Ivanovich."

"Excuse me, gentlemen, I'll be back soon," Denikin said hastily. "It can't be helped." And in the hall, fumbling for the sleeves of his greatcoat, he called out: "You stay here, Prince. You can play one rubber with a dummy. . . . I won't say good-bye, Ekaterina Alexeyevna. . . ."

The players returned to the table, but nobody had any desire for cards. Ekaterina Alexeyevna the elder gave a discreet sigh. Vasili Vasilyevich, knitting his thick brows, drew miniature gibbets and imps on the baize with a bit of chalk. The prince went and sat beside Ekaterina Alexeyevna the younger on the sofa, causing her to flush happily and put down her knitting. His leg jerking, he began telling her that he had discovered a marvellous fortune-teller, and intended to bring her to Anton Ivanovich.

"She takes one of your hairs and burns it in the flame of a candle, and then she foams at the mouth. . . ."

"What did she tell you?"

"She told me I would be making a journey on horseback, and she says I shall be wounded three times, but all will end in a happy wedding."

Fidgeting with his legs, and swaying as if someone were shaking him by the shoulders, the prince laughed till he almost choked. Ekaterina Alexeyevna's soft neck and tiny ear became suffused with colour.

"Oh, dear. It's all so upsetting!" said Ekaterina Alexeyevna the elder, wiping away a tear. "Everyone's nerves are in such a state. . . . Little did we think we should come to this!"

"Yes, we didn't think much," replied Vasili Vasilyevich, and he drew an axe and a block. "Russia is a strange country...."

The Commander in Chief kept his promise: when the English clock in its case struck eleven in its shrill voice, the horn of the motorcar blared raucously under the windows, and Anton Ivanovich, once more removing his overshoes, said:

"I knew you would treat us to turkey stuffed with chestnuts today, Ekaterina Alexeyevna.... And so, my dear Prince, I will ask you to bring a bottle of champagne from my car...."

He was extremely animated, rubbing his hands gleefully, but refused the proposal to finish the rubber. "Oh, let it go! Ekaterina Alexeyevna and I surrender in advance, securing nothing but our honour." He actually took a cigarette from Vasili Vasilyevich's gold case, and lit it, a thing he had never before been known to do. All haste was made with the supper, and everyone went into the little dining room, where two candles shed a soft, old-world glow over the cheap wallpaper and the table, spread with appetizing home-made *pâté* and *hors d'oeuvres* on chipped plates. The only thing missing was Anton Ivanovich's favourite dish—lampreys with mustard sauce. Lacking also was the usual calm with which, after the rubber was over, they sat down to table, still arguing: "I assure you you should have discarded spades...", or: "I knew very well he had the ace, king, and queen—you needn't have kicked me under the table, dear lady...."

The prince, aware of a certain tenseness in the atmosphere, made a gallant attempt to attract general attention to himself by relating an anecdote about a yardman in Petersburg who possessed the mysterious power of curing toothache, burns and St. Anthony's fire, and who had, by the way, predicted the war with Germany by gazing into coffee grounds. The reference to war was not a very happy one, and Vasili Vasilyevich hastened to catch up a decanter and pour out vodka for everyone, crying:

"Let us drink to Russia's wonderful yardmen—may she never lack them!"

Just then the turkey was brought in. The Commander in Chief, leaning back in his chair, followed its progress with a stern eye, as it was placed on the crowded table, the steam from it causing the candle flames to flicker slightly.

"When all is said and done, Russia is the only country where you get turkeys like this," he remarked, picking himself a wing. The prince rose in his seat, opened the bottle of champagne skilfully, and poured the wine into tumblers. Slowly removing the napkin, the end of which had been tucked into his collar, Anton Ivanovich picked up his glass, rose to his feet with his hand on the back of his chair, and said:

"I cannot refrain from telling you the good news, ladies and gentlemen. . . . You must know that French troops landed at Odessa this morning, and Greek troops have occupied Kherson and Nikolayev. The long-awaited help of the allies has arrived at last."

An individual so very strange landed in Ekaterinodar in an English airplane, that ruling and influential circles did not know whether to consider him an agent of Clemenceau, a mere adventurer, or an important personage. His surname—Giraud—was French enough, but he gave himself out as Pyotr Petrovich, and spoke Russian fluently, though with a southern accent. His passport was Uruguayan, but of course this fact indicated not so much nationality as ability to get on in life. He had come by steamer from Paris to Novorossiisk, with a cargo of rifles, cartridges and other munitions. The papers he displayed to the military commandant of the town were extremely impressive, consisting of letters of recommendation from members of parliament, a letter from the Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs, and a letter from a French duchess with an unpronounceable name. Further, he produced a card from *Le Petit Parisien*, and last but not least, business propositions from some of the many firms now springing up like mushrooms around the vast reserves of multifarious goods and perishable cargoes pouring into France from all parts of the world.

But rack their brains as they might, there was no getting away from the fact that a gentleman, every inch a European, smartly attired in a short, fur-lined jacket with a skunk collar, and a brilliantly-patterned flowing muffler, carrying two spick-and-span suitcases, and wearing a camera slung across his shoulder, had dropped as if out of the sky from Paris to remote Ekaterinodar, which still bore traces of the

March and summer campaigns. Even the military commandant could not take his eyes off the newcomer's exquisite brown boots with their thick, protruding soles, not to mention the people in the street along which Pyotr Petrovich, carrying his head high in his jauntily-cocked light-grey hat, followed the Cossack with his suitcases.

The foreigner took up his abode in the "luxury suite" of the best hotel, dislodging the profiteer Paprikaki and his girl friend. The day after his arrival, Giraud paid a visit to General Denikin.

The embarrassed Anton Ivanovich sent General Romanovsky to the anteroom to apologize, saying that the Commander in Chief was not quite well, but was very glad to know that there was so distinguished a visitor in the town.

Giraud then paid a visit to Professor Kologrivov, a pillar of the Duma, who created around Denikin an atmosphere of culture and statesmanship under the name of the "National Centre." Professor Kologrivov, who knew Paris well, and adored it, kept the delightful Giraud several hours, indulging in enthusiastic reminiscences of dinners in little restaurants, and the nocturnal amusements of Montmartre. He recalled the scents of the boulevards and an expression of youthful archness spread over his face, despite his flabby stomach and bushy, unkempt beard.

"Ah, cher ami!" he exclaimed. "Who can forget the specific, inimitable fragrance of Parisian women? Oh, I could kiss the stones in the streets of Paris! Don't let this surprise you—you will find an ardent French patriot in every Russian. . . . That's what you should write about."

It was decided that a few picked representatives of the "National Centre" should meet in a private house for lunch, to hear what Monsieur Giraud had to tell them of the international situation, over lunch.

"Cher ami!" exclaimed Professor Kologrivov, twisting the buttons off his visitor's waistcoat with easy familiarity, "you will see people who realized before you in Europe did the appalling danger of the Red mincing machine. . . . Bolshevism is the devastating rage of the lower classes, the fury of the dregs of humanity. . . . You, even the best and wisest of you, are inclined to make your bow to socialism. Stuff and nonsense! Socialism exists, but there are no socialists, because socialism is impracticable. We will prove it to you. History

has willed it that Russia should be the barrier over which the eternal waves of anarchy should break, so that we, paying for it with our own skins, have made possible the peaceful development of European civilization. . . . In the name of all this, in the name of the deliverance of Europe, of the whole world, from the Red spectre, we stretch our hands out to you—give us your aid! We are ready to make any concessions. Russia will make any sacrifice. . . . That is what you must write about. . . .”

The lunch caused a great ado: just try and find something refined in Ekaterinodar! There was nothing to be had but lard, goose and pork. You couldn't treat a Parisian to dumplings! Von Lize, a well-known gourmand and a member of the “National Centre,” drew up a menu: consommé, meat patties, *matelote au vin rouge*, and for the entrée, a fowl boiled without a drop of water in the bladder of a pig. Some good wine was obtained through the profiteer Paprikaki.

At one o'clock sharp, six persons, including Pyotr Petrovich himself, gathered at the apartment of Shulgin, member of the Duma and publisher-editor of *The Native Land*. The lunch was really exceedingly *recherché*. When the coffee, brewed from parched corn, was served, Giraud began his statement:

“A few words about Paris, gentlemen. . . . You all knew it well formerly. Foreigners used to leave four billion gold francs there annually. It is no wonder that the exhalations from its pavements turned the heads even of those dreamers who gazed upon the tops of gleaming motorcars from attic windows. There are, alas, no more dreamers left in Paris, their corpses are poisoning the atmosphere on the banks of the Somme, in Champagne and in the Ardennes. Paris is no longer a town of gaiety, with people dancing in the streets, and splitting their sides over the beard of King Leopold, or the amorous mishaps of a Russian grand duke. Paris and France have lost one million five hundred thousand men—they have been killed. Paris is filled with lads who have become professional homosexuals. There is no one but melancholy old men in the cafés of Paris, incapable of interesting even twenty-franc prostitutes. Taxis, dented and bullet-ridden on the Marne, clatter over the broken pavements. American soldiers, lustful as stallions, are still admitted to the smartest restaurants and cafés. Women? Oh, women will

cope with any situation! They wear their skirts to their knees and have abolished underwear."

"Make your meaning clearer, please!" came a voice from somewhere at the table.

"At the theatre and in restaurants, women only cover that which is unimportant—to be precise, their dresses consist of two narrow strips of material, to which is attached the shortest of skirts. All their elegance consists in their bare legs—and Parisian women have exquisite legs. What does underwear matter? It was not for nothing that we suffered deprivations in the trenches, devil take it! But these are trifles. Paris today is a victorious city. She is gloomy, her streets are ill-swept, but she is full of the most agitating and ambiguous talk. Paris has won the world war, she is ready to win the world counterrevolution."

Stifled cheers came from three of the lunchers. The fourth guest abstained, being busy rolling bread into pills. The fifth gave a noncommittal chuckle, hitching up one shoulder in a manner equally noncommittal.

"Paris today is the lair of an infuriated tiger. Clemenceau thirsts for vengeance; even before the signing of peace—and that will not take place so soon—Germany will undergo the horrors of blockade and famine. Her teeth will be drawn, her talons clipped, for all time. Clemenceau said, in a private conversation: 'I will kill the very hope of becoming anything but a third-class nation in the Germans. They will have enough peas and potatoes to keep them from actual starvation!' But, gentlemen, fifty years ago Clemenceau knew, in addition to the humiliation of Sedan, the humiliation of the terror inspired by the Paris Commune. Once, at a luncheon for journalists, he indulged in reminiscences and described his sensations on seeing fragments of the columns from the monument to the Great Emperor, scattered over the Place de Vendôme, after the Communards, with the aid of innumerable ropes and winches, had overturned it. 'It was not so much the destruction itself,' he said, 'which appalled me, as the idea inspiring the French workers to do this. A mortal peril threatens civilization, a peril which may be averted for the time being, but which is bound to return, and to return on the day on which arms are put into the hands of the people. This will be the day of our revenge for Sedan, the day on which we shall have to fight on two fronts.' Gentlemen, these

words of Clemenceau have come true: the demobilized soldiers are returning to Paris. They have known the horrors of Verdun and the Somme—and the building of barricades, and street fighting, will be the merest child's play for them. They are shouting in all the taverns, gathering around them at the bars groups of listeners, that they have been betrayed: those who fought have received stripes, crosses and artificial limbs, while those for whom they fought have pocketed millions in hard cash. The bourgeoisie, ruined by the inflation, are flirting with the malcontents. The outlying districts of Paris are in a ferment. The factories are stopping work. The spirit of the troops of the Paris garrison is unpredictable. Germany is in the throes of revolution, and the Social-Democrats can scarcely hold it off. Hungary is on the brink of forming Soviets.... England is going through a strike wave, with the Lloyd George government endeavouring to steer amidst the reefs. All eyes are turned on Clemenceau. He alone realizes that the mortal blow must be dealt to the European revolution in your country, in Moscow. When Italian fishermen extract an octopus from their nets, they bite through its air bladder, and its feelers with their monstrous suckers hang powerless."

The guests round the luncheon table listened to him, ever and anon rumpling their hair, or removing blurry spectacles. When Giraud stopped talking for a moment, to bite off the end of a fresh cigar, he was bombarded with questions:

"How many French divisions have been sent to Odessa?"

"Do the French intend to march into the interior of the country?"

"Do they know in Paris about the latest failures of Krasnov's offensive at Tsaritsyn? Will there be help for Krasnov?"

"Has Russia been split up into spheres of influence? And who intends to afford the Volunteer Army solid assistance?"

Giraud slowly emitted a cloud of bluish smoke.

"You are questioning me as if I were Clemenceau, gentlemen," he said. "I'm only a journalist. Certain newspapers have taken up the Russian question, and I have been sent to you. The problem of direct aid to the troops is becoming more and more complicated. Lloyd George is anxious not to offend anyone unnecessarily. For him to send even two battalions of English infantry to Novorossiisk would mean to lose two dozen votes at the coming by-election. My latest

information is as follows: Lloyd George has hastened to Paris by plane (preferring this form of transport on account of the floating mines released in the Channel by recent storms) and expressed himself thus—it was a day or two ago—at the Council of Ten: the hopes of the Bolshevik government collapsing in the near future have not been realized, the Bolsheviks are at present stronger than ever, and their influence among the people is growing—even the peasantry are going over to their side. Taking into consideration the fact that Bolshevik Russia has gone back to the natural boundaries of the XV-century Moscow-Suzdal dominion, and does not represent a serious menace for anyone, the Moscow government should be invited to Paris to appear before the Council of Ten, just as the leaders of the outlying districts subordinate to Rome were invited by the Roman Empire to report to it on their activities.... Such, gentlemen, is the situation in the West.... Has anybody any questions?"

A few days after this luncheon (which was entered in the annals of the "National Centre" by Professor Kologrivov), the military commandant, while reporting to the Commander in Chief, gave him the following information:

"Precisely opposite the Savoy Hotel, Your Excellency, a purchasing centre has been opened. Nothing is accepted but gold and diamonds, and the prices are suspiciously high, and in Don currency.... The quality of the money has given rise to doubts—all the notes are new...."

"You're always having doubts, Vitali Vitalyevich," said Denikin angrily, glancing over the galley proofs of the war bulletins. "Again you have had a Jew flogged without my knowledge, and he turns out not to be a Jew at all, but an Orel landed proprietor.... There are plenty of dark-haired people in the Orel district, many of them even resemble gipsies.... Oh, what a blunderer you are!"

"Your Excellency must excuse me—a moment of aberration.... But about this shop—the licence is made out in the name of the Ekaterinoslav black marketer Paprikaki, but it has been ascertained that the real owner, who invested the capital of doubtful value in the concern" (here the commandant bowed as low as his corpulence would allow him to) "is the Frenchman Pyotr Petrovich Giraud...."

Denikin flung the galleys on the table.

"Look here, Colonel!" he exclaimed, "you want to ruin

our relations with France for a few chains and baubles! What else have you done about this shop?"

"I have had the cashbox sealed."

"Go and have all seals removed, and apologize this minute. Or else. . . ."

"Very good, Excellency!"

Stepping on tiptoe, the commandant bore his great belly through the door. The Commander in Chief drummed with his fingers a long time on the military bulletins, his grey moustache twitching.

"Scoundrelly nation!" he said, and it would have been impossible to say to whom his words were meant to apply—to his own, or the French nation.

* XV *

Fresh disappointment awaited Vadim Petrovich at the farmstead of Prokhladni. The gate leading to the hut in which Katya and the Krasilnikovs had lived stood wide open, all footprints had been covered up by pure white snow, and on the threshold of the deserted hut was a mound of snow thawing beneath the drippings from the eaves.

Nobody could tell Vadim Petrovich where Krasilnikov had gone with the two women. That a man called Krasilnikov had lived here was not denied, but where he came from, or what his village was, who could say? All sorts of people drifted to Makhno.

The hut smelled of the cold stove, there was a litter of rubbish on the floor, snow had drifted in through the broken windowpane, and two bare cots stood at the wall. The absent Katya had not left so much as her shadow on the peeling walls. After so much endeavour their paths had crossed, but he had arrived too late!

Vadim Petrovich seated himself on the unplanned boards of one of the cots. Which of them had been their marriage bed, he wondered. Alexei was a handsome, impudent fellow. . . . "You've had your cry, now wipe your eyes," he must have told her—not roughly, of course, he was too clever to be rough with a lady. He probably said it gaily, authoritatively. . . . And the kitten had quieted down, obeyed, given in. . . . Bashful, chaste, she had let him have his will with

her. . . . She hadn't dashed out her brains against the wall—not she! Passive and indifferent, she had probably clung to the support she had found, as the pale convolvulus with its bitter-tasting flowers winds itself round the trunk of a tree.

Vadim Petrovich blundered about the hut, stamping on empty tins. He told himself that his depraved and unbridled imagination had lied. Katya had struggled, refused to surrender, remained faithful, pure. Cowardly vulgarian that he was! Did he expect her to have remained pure, true to his memory? And he? Would he have killed them both on this creaking bed? Or, glancing at them from the door, and seeing the eyes of Katya—that lost world—would he have said: "Excuse me—I seem to be in the way!"? This is it—the rack itself. . . . Here it is, at last, the terrible ordeal! You can stand no more? You can, you can! You will search for Katya, search, search. . . .

The crooked-visaged Karetnik, who had accompanied Roshchin to Prokhladni, was sitting waiting in the cart for him. Passing through the gate, Roshchin clambered into the cart, and raised the collar of his coat to shield his face from the wind. Makhno's personal driver and bodyguard, who carried out his master's brief sentences as soon as they were pronounced, a lanky, taciturn individual, known as the Great Mute, the lower part of whose face was disproportionately long, giving him the appearance of a reflection in a concave mirror, drove the four-in-hand so recklessly that Roshchin had to hold on to the sides of the cart with both hands to keep his seat.

Bumping up and down with the motion of the cart, Karetnik said, in a tone of the utmost familiarity:

"Stop whimpering, you damned fool! If the Old Man has given orders that your wife is to be found, she will be found wherever she is. Good Lord! Is that all you have to worry about? Women are only painted on the outside to look different—underneath the paint they're all the same. Nothing but a plague. . . . To hell with her, she won't leave him. Alexei Krasilnikov got together three cartloads of loot for her. . . . He was the best looter in the Company—he was lucky to get away while the going was good. . . ."

Vadim Petrovich, hiding his face up to the forehead behind his upturned collar, kept saying to himself: "You can, you can! This is only the beginning of your ordeal. . . ."

They dashed over the cobbled street of Gulyai-Polye at full speed till the Great Mute reined in the four sweating horses in front of headquarters. Roshchin was expected, and immediately summoned to Makhno, who was presiding over a solemn council of war in the unheated classroom, with the commanders seated uncomfortably at the small desks. Makhno himself, in a black tunic, with light-brown straps crossed over it, paced up and down in front of the desks with pantherlike strides. He was evidently quite sober, but this only made his face look more sodden than it did when he was drunk. His hands were behind his back, the right grasping the limply dangling left arm. For the space of a second he transfixed Vadim Petrovich with an unblinking gaze.

"You will go to Ekaterinoslav," he said in rasping tones, "and present a mandate to the Revolutionary Committee. You will inspect the plan for the rising as a representative from my staff: Go!"

Roshchin saluted briskly, turned on his heel, and left the room. Levka Zadov was waiting for him in the corridor.

"All is in order. I have your mandate," he said, propelling Roshchin along the corridor with an arm round his shoulders, and pushing him with a movement of his thigh towards a door. "You'll have to part with your greatcoat. I'll give you a fur-lined one."

His arm still round Roshchin's shoulders, he unlocked the door with three different keys. "My very own, lined with splendid fur. You'd better make friends with Levka. Anyone who's friends with Levka holds trumps."

Steering Roshchin into a room, which had the same stale smell as the room in the Cultural-Educational Centre, he went on boasting of himself and his possessions, which lay in confusion about the room. The coat he selected for Vadim Petrovich really was a very fine one, even though it was punctured by bullet holes here and there in the front and back. Breathing heavily—for he was a fat man—he began feeling under the bed, and dragged out a pile of headgears, from which he extracted a lambskin cap with a crimson crown, throwing it across the room to Roshchin, never doubting that the latter would catch it in mid-air. Then, with a final, lavish gesture, he tore down from the wall a silver-mounted Caucasian sword: "Take it—why not, after all! It belonged to an officer of the guards. . . ." Then he began fitting himself out,

fastening a gold wrist watch on either hand, and buckling over his jacket a belt with two Mausers in it and a sword in a worn scabbard, saying, as he tried its edge with a fingertip: "This is my everyday sword." He thrust his feet into ankle-high rubber overshoes, with the remark: "Who says I'm not a cavalryman? As they say in dear old Odessa..." Over all, he drew a sheepskin coat, exclaiming:

"Come on, ducky! We're to go together."

They were driven to the station by the inevitable Great Mute.

"He's enormously strong," said Levka, taking pains not to be heard by the driver. "He was a convict. The Old Man and he escaped together from hard labour under the tsar. You've got to mind your p's and q's with him—the brute doesn't like to be stared at. Even I'm afraid of him..."

Rosy and pleased, Levka lolled complacently in the cart.

"Luckily for you, Roshchin, I've taken a fancy to you.... I like aristocrats.... The other day I had to finish off three brothers—the Golitsin princes.... It was a pleasure to see the way they stood up to it."

The same sort of monologue went on in the railway carriage, to which Levka had spirits and snacks brought from the station buffet. He removed his sheepskin coat and loosened his belt.

"It's incredible," he said, cutting bacon fat into thick slices, "I say it's incredible that you never heard of me before. They couldn't do enough for me in Odessa—money, women, I had everything.... Only gigantic strength like mine could have stood it. Ah, youth! They wrote about me in all the papers—Zadov, the poet-humourist. D'you mean to say you don't remember? My life story is very interesting. I left school with a gold medal. And my Dad is only a carter from Peresyp. And here was I—suddenly at the pinnacle of fame! No wonder: divinely handsome—I didn't have this corporation then—daring, arrogant, a marvellous voice—a light baritone. An endless flow of witty couplets. I was the one who introduced the fashion of wearing a short sheepskin jacket and patent-leather boots—the Russian knight-errant! Odessa was covered with posters.... Ah, well—Zadov was never one to grudge anything—he gave it all up for a song! Anarchy—that's the life! I am carried along in a whirlpool of blood. Say something, ducky! You must be more friendly with

Levka. Surely you're not still angry! Better try and like me. There are plenty of people who turn pale when I speak to them.... But the ones I make friends of are constant to me to the grave.... They love me—how they love me...."

Vadim Petrovich's head was swimming. The shock he had received earlier in the day had left him with a desire to howl like a dog in some deserted spot, baying at a sulphurous moon. The unexpected mission, the curt, obscure order, represented fresh ordeals. He realized that he would answer with his life for a false or suspicious move—that was what Levka had been sent with him for. What was this Military Revolutionary Committee to which he must go as an inspector? What was the plan of rising he was to inspect? Who was rising, and against whom? Levka knew, of course. Roshchin tried several times to put a leading question to him, but all that happened was that one of Levka's eyebrows flew up, and his eyes became glassy, while he went on with his bragging as if he had heard nothing, eating noisily, never wiping his lips, and growing redder and redder, till he was forced to unbutton the collar of his embroidered blouse.

Vadim Petrovich swallowed a glass of spirits, too, and munched mechanically at a slice of bacon without feeling the slightest satisfaction. He was exerting all his energies to overcome his loathing for this terrible, ridiculous, repulsive individual.... Not even in a novel had he come across a fiend like this! The creature had actually invented an epigraph for himself: "I am carried along in a whirlpool of blood!" As the liquor surged through Roshchin's veins, the vise in which his brain had been held relaxed, and a reckless confidence took the place of the mechanical, now almost ineffective asseveration: "You can! You can!"

"Stop your fooling, now," he said to Levka. "The Old Man gave me definite instructions, I'm a military man, I don't like riddles. Out with it—what's it all about?"

Again the smile froze on Levka's lips. His plump hand, pitted with enlarged pores, hung over the glass, holding a bottle:

"I advise you to ask fewer questions and show less curiosity. Everything is arranged."

"So I am not trusted. What the hell am I being sent for then?"

"I trust nobody. I don't even trust the Old Man. Come on—let's drink!"

Opening his mouth so wide that the glass went right in, Levka slowly poured the spirits down his throat. A sickly odour, as of raw meat and sugar, came from his mouth. . . . Shaking back his abundant hair, which crackled with electricity, he started mauling the leg of a chicken.

"In your place I would not have accepted the mission. What if the Old Man gave you the order. The Old Man likes fooling. You'll land yourself in a nice mess, ducky. . . ."

Laughing, Roshchin rubbed his face vigorously with the palms of his hands.

"Do you advise me to get out of it? Perhaps I'd better go to the lav. and jump out while the train's going! Is that your advice as a friend?"

"There's no saying. . . . I've told you what I think, you can draw your own conclusions."

"A cheap stunt! D'you think I'm afraid of death?"

"Why should I think, when I can see right through you, you creeping vermin? Better not show your teeth— I'll pull them out. Come on now! Pour yourself out a glass!"

Roshchin drew a deep, difficult sigh.

"You think you know me? No, Zadov, you don't know me. . . . If *you* were put with your back to the wall, now, you'd squeal like the swine you are. . . ." Levka, who was now ready to bite into the leg of the chicken, brought his teeth together with a loud snap, his perspiring face sagging.

"So far the contrary has been the case," he spluttered. "So far it's others who have squealed. I wonder if you mean to finish me up yourself?"

"If you had fallen into my hands three months ago. . . ."

"None of your shuffling, White officer, out with it!"

"Can't you wait, butcher?"

"I'm waiting, go on. . . ."

Both spoke rapidly, breathing heavily, their legs thrust beneath the seat, staring steadily into each other's eyes. The candle stuck to the drop-table at the window spluttered and the flame burned low. Roshchin, noticing that Levka's crimson face was turning grey, muttered thickly:

"Come on out into the corridor. . . . You go first."

"Not I!"

"Out with you!"

"Who are you to order me about? I'm not going."

There was now nothing left of the candle but a blue flame on the tip of the wick, like a spirit which could not die. Apparently Levka realized that all the advantage would be on the side of the short, wiry Roshchin if they began struggling in the dark. He bellowed like a bull:

"Get up-go into the corridor!"

Suddenly the door into the carriage was pushed aside, the flame flickered and flared up, and Chugai entered.

"Hullo, mates!" There was a smile on his lips beneath his small moustache, and his prominent eyes rolled from Levka to Roshchin. "I've been looking for you all over the train."

He sat down beside Roshchin and opposite Levka. Picking up the empty bottle, he shook it, sniffed at it, and set it down again.

"Why are you both so glum?"

"We don't get on," said Levka, turning aside from the other's mocking glance.

"You're accompanying him as a kind of commissar?"

"I'm not a kind of anything, try again a bit higher. What's it got to do with you, anyway?"

"All the more you should realize how important the mission to which you are leading the comrade, is. You should learn to control your temper. Go out of the compartment, please, mate, I want to have a talk with him."

Chugai sat down compactly, his hands folded over his stomach, his legs set well apart. In the light of the candle his face looked pink, as if it were made of porcelain, and it was a wonder how the childish sailor cap with the ribbons stayed on his head. He waited calmly for Levka to get over his humiliation, and obey.

Breathing heavily, Levka, red-faced and sullen, cast a threatening look at Roshchin and rose noisily, the tops of his patent-leather knee boots shining in the doorway as he went out. Chugai shoved the door to.

"What were you quarrelling about?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Roshchin. "We've been drinking."

"That's the way to answer. But look here, mate-you've been placed directly at my disposal, and you must answer all my questions."

He got up and sat on the opposite seat, close to the candle, unfolding a half sheet of paper bearing the signature of Makhno, on which was written in irregular typescript, full of grammatical errors, and innocent of punctuation marks, that Roshchin had been placed at the disposal of military revolutionary headquarters for the Ekaterinoslav District.

"Is that good enough for you?" he asked. Roshchin nodded. "Splendid! Tell me, now, what made you get into this lot?"

"Is this a formal interrogation?"

"That's what it is. You can't trust a man till you know him—especially in such important business. Don't you agree?" (Roshchin nodded.) "I have had inquiries made. . . . and the upshot was by no means reassuring: you're our enemy, our sworn enemy, mate. . . ."

Roshchin threw himself back on the seat with a sigh. Outside the window, in which the flame of the candle was reflected, the night, dark as eternity, sped by. He felt quite calm. His body rocked gently. This was the third interrogation in the last three days, during which time he had practically had no sleep—but it was evidently going to be the last, the final one. And after all what was the truth that he could say about himself? A complicated, confused and nebulous tale of a man turned out of his childhood home, the street where he was born, his own realm, by unknown persons. But was this the truth? Who was it that had taken him by the scruff of the neck and thrown him on the dung heap? Himself, and none other. What was it, actually, that he feared? What was the thing he hated? Had the old house and the old, cosy realm really been so essential to his well-being? Were they not merely spectres raised by his morbid imagination? Looking back he could find no rational grounds, no justification, for his conduct during the past year. Here in the railway carriage there was no court, with a jury and an eloquent counsel for the defence, tossing back a romantic mane of hair. Here he was up against the necessity of doing the almost impossible—telling the truth—not the truth about the actions of an insignificant individual, that was not important, they did not count in this conversation, but the truth about the real man within him. Here one was both accused and judge. . . . And it was not the practical issue of this conversation which was important, since they had got down to the real man within. . . .

"Don't talk to yourself, speak up," said Chugai.

"No, I'm not an enemy, that would be too simple," said Roshchin, pressing the back of his head against the wall of the carriage. "An enemy has an aim, feels anger, displays cunning. . . . I want to put a question to you. . . ."

"Go ahead."

"Do you need me as a military expert?"

Chugai looked in silence at Roshchin's face and at the deep shadows in the hollows of his cheek.

"How would you answer that question yourself?" he said at last.

"I think you do—more than Makhno does."

Makhno says you were mobilized in the Volunteer Army, but according to him you are a sincere anarchist, and your origins are suitable."

"That's all lies. My past is absolutely unsuitable. I joined the Volunteer Army because I wanted to. And I left it because I wanted to."

"Your conscience troubled you?"

"No . . . don't try and put words into my mouth. I'm not clinging to a straw, I've been at the bottom for ages. If one could only believe in the expiation of grievous sins. . . . But I haven't even that consolation."

"Committed a lot of atrocities?"

"That too. . . . All my life I exacted honesty from myself, and my honesty has turned out to be dishonour. . . . And it was the same with everything—the world seemed to have rolled over on its back, and black had become white. . . ."

"Tell me your story, mate, we might as well be regular."

"I graduated at the university of Petersburg . . . legal faculty. Oh yes, you want to know my origins . . . I was a landowner, a petty proprietor. After my mother's death I sold up everything, lock, stock and barrel—the house, the grounds, the family burial ground. I left the regiment. What else? I was a liberal, like everybody with a streak of decency. . . ." (Here Vadim Petrovich frowned disgustedly.) "Of course I was in sympathy with the idea of the coming revolution, during strikes I even opened the ventilation pane—it was 1913, I think—and shouted 'Hangmen, butchers!' to the mounted police when they rode up. And that's about the extent of my revolutionary activities. . . . I was in no hurry—the life I led suited me down to the ground." (At this,

Chugai's moustache twitched.) "Don't be too eager to despise me. . . . I'm being frank with you. At least I never raised my glass of champagne at banquets to the long-suffering Russian people. And in 1917 I nearly went mad with shame and disgust at the front. I was two and a half years in the trenches without asking for promotion . . . and I didn't wear a silk shirt against the lice."

"Very fine of you, I'm sure."

"You needn't sneer at me. . . ." (Vadim Petrovich wrinkled up his brow. His gaunt face was furrowed by profound shadows.) "Tell me this: what does your country mean to you? A day in June when you were a child, the bees humming in the limes, and the feeling that joy was surging up within you like streams of honey. . . . The Russian sky over the Russian land. Do you think I didn't love all that? Do you think I didn't love the millions of grey coats entraining for the front and for death? I had made my accounts with death, and did not expect to come back from the war. . . . My country was I, myself, a proud, great man. . . . And then it appeared that that was not what my country was—it was something different. . . . It was—they. Answer me: what is one's country? What is it for you? You are silent. . . . I know what you would say. . . . People only ask that once in a lifetime, when they have lost their country. . . . Oh, it's not my Petersburg flat, my legal career that I lost. . . . I've lost the great man in myself, and I don't want to be a small one. Go on—shoot me if a single word I have said rings false. . . . The grey coats disposed of things in their own way. . . . What was there left for me to do? I began to hate them! My brain was gripped in leaden hoops. . . . Only men thirsting for vengeance, bloodthirsty, ferocious ruffians went into the Volunteer Army. 'For the tsar, for the native land, for our religion, we utter a loud hurrah. . . .' And off we go on a gipsy troika to the Yar, to eat the fish pies it was famous for. . . ."

"You're just ripe to be popped into the oven, mate," said Chugai, and the fixed stare of his prominent eyes softened. "It's wonderful to get into talk with you intellectuals! Where do you get all that farrago from? After all, you're Russians, and seem to be clever people. . . . It must be the bourgeois upbringing. You've lost yourself, have you? He's not even sure whether he really exists or not. Oh, Denikinites! Well,

you've entertained me. . . . What are you and I to decide on? Do you want to work, not just to keep yourself alive, but with your whole heart?"

"Certainly I do, if that's the way you put it."

"But you're not keen."

"I've said I would, and I will."

Again Chugai picked up the empty bottle and shook it; he looked under the drop-table and glanced up at the luggage rack.

"Let's have your son-of-a-bitch in now," he said, opening the door and calling out: "Commissar, where have you hidden the drink?" Addressing Roshchin, he said with a meaning wink: "Keep him in order—at the first sign of anything, pull the trigger. He's the most dangerous of all Makhno's men."

Roshchin, Chugai, and the now drink-sodden Levka got off the train just before it reached the bridge. The mist rising from the Dnieper hung over Ekaterinoslav on the opposite bank. All three of them hunched up their shoulders in silence against the damp cold; buffers clattered, and the train at last crawled over the bridge. A woman wrapped in a woollen shawl, from which only a pair of keen eyes were visible, then appeared on the boards of the platform. She passed them once, and then again, walking more and more slowly, and as she passed them a third time, Chugai said, as if thinking aloud:

"I wonder where we could get a glass of tea."

She halted immediately.

"I can show you where," she replied. "But we have no sugar."

"We have our own sugar."

At this she threw off the woollen shawl, displaying a face of surprising charm, a youthful face with a dimple on one rounded cheek, and a tiny, pouting mouth.

"Where are you from, Comrades?"

"Never you mind where we're from—you and your conspiracies," replied Levka angrily, "lead on!"

The girl raised astonished eyebrows, but Chugai assured her that they were "the ones she was to meet." Jumping down from the platform she led them across a siding cluttered with damaged trucks. They did not encounter a single soul

as, clambering over braking platforms, or diving beneath trucks, they arrived at a covered freight car, on the side of which the girl knocked, crying:

"It's me—Marusya—I've brought them."

The double doors of the truck slid cautiously apart, and a pale face, stern and gaunt, with coal-black eyes, looked out.

"In with you!" said the owner of the face softly. "You're letting the cold in."

The three of them climbed into the truck, followed by Marusya. The man with the black eyes pulled the doors to. Inside it was warm from a small red-hot iron stove: a wick floating in an old blacking tin faintly lit up the inscrutable face of the Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Committee, and two vague figures in the background.

Chugai showed his credentials. Levka, too, pulled out a paper. The Chairman, squatting beside the light, perused them long.

"All right," he said, getting up. "We've been waiting for you since the day before yesterday. Sit down." He looked askance at Levka's patent-leather riding boots. "Makhno doesn't seem to be in a hurry."

Levka sat down first, on the only stool at the rough table. Chugai sat himself astride a chopping block. Roshchin moved over and leaned against the side of the truck. So this was Bolshevik headquarters. . . . A bare truck and stern faces, which looked as if they belonged to cautious, taciturn railway workers.

The Chairman began speaking in level tones:

"We are ready. The people are eager. We must start immediately. According to information received the Petlurites have got wind of something—a heavy battery was unloaded in the city yesterday. They are expecting troops from Kiev. We have no traitors here, so any information received by them can only have come from Gulyai-Polye."

"Now, now, you be careful what you say!" came from Levka in a menacing growl.

Two figures immediately moved closer from the darkness. The Chairman went on in the same level tone:

"Everything goes on in the open there. It won't do, Comrades. . . . Arrests have begun in Ekaterinoslav. Up till now

they have not been very systematic, but recently one of our comrades was arrested. . . ."

"Misha Krivomaz, Young Communist," put in Marusya, in a ringing voice with a slight, girlish break in it. She was standing beside Vadim Petrovich and had thrown back her shawl on to her shoulders.

"He was examined by Naregorodtsev himself, chief of their Intelligence. This means they must be on the alert. . . ."

"They beat Misha Krivomaz over the head with a rubber truncheon, the poor boy's eyes popped out," said Marusya, speaking very fast and beginning to snuffle. "They cut off two of his fingers and ripped his stomach open, but he wouldn't give anything away."

Levka, thrusting his sword between his legs, said contemptuously:

"That's cheap stuff. Naregorodtsev, you say? We won't forget him. Who's Public Prosecutor here? And who's their chief of police?"

"We'll let you have their names and addresses. . . ."

The Chairman interrupted Marusya:

"We must act in an organized manner, Comrades. Fedyuk will report to us on the enemy's strength." (He pointed to a thickset man, one empty sleeve of whose greasy jacket was thrust into his belt.) "I myself will report on the work of the Revolutionary Committee. The report on Makhno I will leave to you. The fourth point refers to the Mensheviks, Anarchists and Left S.R.s. These swine feel there's something juicy to be had, and are fighting for places in the Soviet. Go ahead, Fedyuk."

Fedyuk began his report in a firm voice, going right back to the bloodthirsty plans of the world bourgeoisie, but the Chairman interrupted him at once: "You're not addressing a meeting—let's have the bare facts." The bare facts turned out to be extremely grave: there were about two thousand of Petlura's infantry in Ekaterinoslav, as well as sixteen guns, four of which were heavy ones. There were, moreover, volunteer troops made up of bourgeois elements and regular officers, in possession of large numbers of machine guns. And to crown all, Kiev was preparing to send reinforcements.

From the second report it appeared that the Military Revolutionary Committee could count on three and a half thousand workers who would unhesitatingly support the Bolshevik

organization, and on an influx of peasant youth from the surrounding villages, where much propaganda had been made. But they were very short of arms: "We may say that ten per cent are armed, and the rest have nothing but their bare hands."

Observing that Chugai was fidgeting, and Levka's nether lip was drooping, the Chairman, his eyes gleaming like lumps of anthracite, raised his voice:

"We don't insist—if Makhno is afraid to attack the city himself, let him stay in Gulyai-Polye, so long as he lets us have rifles and munition."

Flushing crimson, Levka banged on the floor with his sword.

"Don't try and fool me, Comrade.... We don't deal in arms.... Makhno will sweep away the Petlura curs with one wave of his arm...."

At this, Chugai said:

"Comrade Levka, keep cool, hold your tongue for a moment! You see, Comrades, we've come to an agreement with Makhno. He considers himself at the disposal of the Ukrainian Commander in Chief. Makhno's People's Army, now the Fifth Division, will take the field as soon as it gets orders. I have the order of the Commander in Chief in my pocket. Let us coordinate our actions.... We have a military expert with us. Comrade Roshchin, come nearer, if you please."

Chugai returned the same night to Makhno, at Gulyai-Polye. He took Levka with him, partly to prevent the workers looking askance at his fat face, patent-leather riding boots and high overshoes, and partly because he was reluctant to leave a fool like that alone with Roshchin.

Marusya was attached to Roshchin—she was to keep him in touch with the forces, and watch over him. The Revolutionary Military Committee's plan was no earthly good, and Roshchin told them so immediately, without beating about the bush. The Revolutionary Committee suggested that he should investigate the city himself, and turn in a plan of his own. Every morning Marusya and he rowed themselves across the steaming Dnieper, amidst ice floes, and landed on the right bank, at the suburb of Mandirovka, where they would get some peasant driving to the market to give them

a lift to the railway station, from where, on foot or by tram, they made their way into the town.

The station and railway bridge were at the south end of the city, and Ekaterininski Avenue, a wide thoroughfare lined with acacias and Lombardy poplars, ran the whole length of the town. On either side of it were new, solidly-built buildings with plate-glass windows—banks, hotels, the post office, and the town hall. The avenue rose steeply up to the Old Town, which was built around the cathedral close. Here, also, the barracks were situated.

Vadim Petrovich taught Marusya to count paces, to determine angles at sight, and to carry in her head the most important places vulnerable to attack. Every now and then they would resort to a café and sketch a plan on a sheet of paper. This sheet, folded up like a envelope, was held clenched in Marusya's fist, so that she could cram it into her mouth and swallow it, should they be stopped by a policeman. But no one so much as glanced at them, although pretty Marusya in her simple kerchief, bound round her head in the Ukrainian fashion, and Roshchin in his crimson-crowned sheepskin cap, must have been noticeable to the most careless observer. But no one here had time to think about them. The Petlura authorities, having declared themselves republican and democratic, were smothered in committees of every sort: Socialist, Zionist, Anarchist, Nationalist, Constituent Assembly, S.R., N.S., P.P.S., Moderate, More-or-Less Moderate, committees with their own programs, and committees without any programs at all. And all these parasites demanded recognition, premises, and funds, under the threat of undermining public confidence. The final touch was contributed to the general muddle by the City Duma, presided over by Paprikaki Junior (Paprikaki Senior, who was wiser, had fled to Denikin). The local Duma tried to run a duplicate authority, actually insisting on the organization of a special regiment, or in the Cossack terminology adopted by the Petlurites a *Kuren*, to be called after a former mayor, the late Khaim Solomonovich Gistory. Obviously the only activities open to the Petlura authorities consisted in the arresting of Communist workers in nightly house raids, and even then, only those living on the right bank of the Dnieper.

After their day of roving about the city, Marusya and Roshchin would go home the shortest way, crossing the river

by the bridge, and making their way to the suburb on the left bank, and a whitewashed hut on the promontory overlooking the Dnieper.

There the stove was always well heated, emitting the characteristic, homely smell of the compressed dung used as fuel. Marusya's mother would come out of her room with a fat railway candle (Marusya's father worked on the railway), and ask softly, touching the stove with her hand: "Are you warm enough?"

"Lovely and warm, Mother."

"Will you have supper?"

"We're as hungry as wolves, Mother."

Then the mother would say, sighing:

"Your father and I have had supper. Go in and have yours, young people are always hungry."

Then slowly, as if absorbed in thoughts inexpressibly mournful, she would go behind the partition. She would then pick up the oven prongs and, bending under the strain, draw a great pot of *borshch* out of the oven, murmuring: "Don't you fall and break, now, for God's sake!" The father, smoking his pipe, would sit awkwardly on the side of the bed. They both tried to take no notice of Roshchin, whom they called among themselves "the Secret One," but if Vadim Petrovich asked for anything—a scoopful of water, or matches—Marusya's father would start up from his seat on the bed, and her mother would shift from foot to foot in her anxiety to serve.

Roshchin and Marusya would sit and eat their *borshch*, which they ladled from the cast-iron pot to chipped plates. Marusya never stopped talking. The impressions of the day were reflected to the minutest detail in the translucent pool of her memory.

"For the love of Christ, eat properly," her mother would say, from the stove, "food doesn't nourish when you talk."

"Mama, I haven't said a word all day!" Marusya looked at Roshchin with wide-open eyes—not very big but very blue. "I'm a terrible chatterbox, you know—they didn't want to take me into the Young Communist League at first because of that. What sort of secret work can there be, if you can't hold your tongue? But I passed the test—I didn't say a word for a whole week."

After supper, Marusya would throw on her warm shawl and run off to a Party meeting, and Roshchin, thanking his hosts for his supper, would pass through the back part of the room, behind the partition, into a narrow chamber, so low, that he could touch the rough surface of the ceiling with his hand. Thrusting his hands into his belt he would pace backwards and forwards from the tiny shuttered window to Marusya's deal chest of drawers, before removing his belt and tunic and sitting at the window, listening through the closed shutters to the distant, muffled rustling of the ice floes far below on the Dnieper. On the other side of the partition the old people were already in bed. The only sounds in the little house were the cracking of the stucco on the stove and the noise made by a cricket as it sawed a tiny log with its tiny saw. Vadim Petrovich was unexpectedly calm and happy, and only the simplest, most everyday thoughts passed through his mind.

Not wishing to go to bed before Marusya came back, he would rise and begin his pacing backwards and forwards again, to keep himself awake. He was greatly taken with the tiny chamber with the whitewashed walls. There were very few of Marusya's things in it—a skirt hanging on a nail, on the chest of drawers a comb and a small looking glass, and a few books from the library.... Marusya had allotted the short iron bedstead along the wall to Roshchin, making up a bed for herself on a felt mat on the floor.

On one such evening the front door banged as usual, and the door to the kitchen opened with a cautious creak. Then Marusya appeared, all rosy from the frost. Unwinding her shawl, she said:

"I'm so glad you sat up. Heard the latest? Makhno will be here in three days. You must submit your plan tomorrow. It's such a lovely night! So still, and such stars...."

Marusya was so profoundly absorbed in important affairs, and in her wealth of impressions, and was so naive, that, after making up her bed on the floor, she undressed in front of Vadim Petrovich without a trace of embarrassment, throwing her skirt, blouse and stockings all over the place. She sat on her pallet for a moment, encircling her knees with her arms. Then with the words "Oh, how tired I am!" she punched the pillow with her fist, and settled down, pulling the padded quilt over her head. The next minute, however,

she poked her face out again, rosy, dimpled, and snub-nosed.

"How hot it is!" she exclaimed throwing her bare arms over the top of the quilt. "You're not asleep, are you?"

"No, Marusya, I'm not."

"Is it true that you were a White officer?"

"Quite true, Marusya."

"I had an argument about you today.... Some comrades don't trust you. Some of them are so, you know, suspicious.... They'd suspect their own mothers.... But if you trust a person, how can you help it? I'd rather be mistaken than think everybody I meet is a snake in the grass. Who's going to make the revolution with you, if everybody's a snake? And we're making a world revolution.... The revolution is a special force, I tell them.... See what I mean? Where should I be, now, but for the revolution? Gumming cardboard twelve hours a day in a paper factory ... my only joy to nibble sunflower seeds on Ekaterininski Avenue of a Sunday.... Say I put by enough to buy myself a pair of lace-up boots—well, what about it? 'Why don't you trust him, Comrades?' I ask them. 'An intellectual can be mistaken, can't he? What if he did serve his own class? He's a human being for all that.... Worse people than he have been made over by the revolution. Can't he exchange his wretched little class for the world revolution? Why not? And he came to us of his own accord, to fight for the workers' cause.... You have to have a very suspicious nature not to trust him after that....' I persuaded a lot of them."

Roshchin lay curled up on the short bed, looking at Marusya, who alternately brandished her bare white arms and hugged herself in a passionate gesture. The low room seemed full of her virginal freshness, as if someone had brought into it a branch of white lilac.

"Certainly the intellectuals must be re-educated.... We'll re-educate *you*, too.... What are you laughing at?"

"I'm not laughing, Marusya.... It is many, many years since I felt so fit for working in a good cause.... D'you know what I've decided? I'll go with the first detachment to occupy the bridge...."

"You will? Do you mean it?"

Marusya slipped quickly from beneath the quilt and perched herself on the side of his bed.

"Now I believe that you're really one of us," she said. "I kept on shouting and arguing, but you know I had no actual proof...."

On the twenty-sixth, fifty Petlura cavalymen thundered over the metals of the Dnieper railway bridge, fell upon the goods station, cut down the workers guarding a train of four trucks in process of being stacked with sandbags against attack, and dispersed themselves along the tracks, shooting into train windows—all this with the utmost haste and agitation. A raid had been planned on the Revolutionary Committee's headquarters, but the Petlurites, fearing ambushes on the crowded tracks, bolted for the open spaces, to go back to where they had come from.

They placed machine guns on the other side of the bridge and made all passers-by show their papers. The situation was growing more and more tense. Rumours of wholesale house raids came from the working-class districts. Peasants from villages in the outlying districts arrived that day, not one at a time, but in groups of ten, travelling light, their sheepskin jackets tightly belted. The Revolutionary Committee formed them into a separate regiment. Formalities did not take long, each candidate was asked:

"What made you come here?"

"I've come for a rifle."

"What d'you want a rifle for?"

"Soviets must be set up, or that nonsense will begin all over again."

"Do you recognize the Soviet Power unconditionally?"

"Why not? Who wants conditions?"

"Go and join the 2nd Company."

But rifles were short, until Chugai turned up unexpectedly, towards noon, in a train consisting of an engine and one truck, loaded with three hundred Austrian rifles and a supply of ammunition. This somewhat eased matters. And at last, quite late that evening, the steppe was filled with the thunder and clatter of the approach of Makhno's long-awaited army.

The first to arrive at the workers' suburb was the "Kropotkin Guards," a cavalry unit, worthy followers of the Old Man, all the same height. They occupied the school immediately, throwing out books, desks and schoolmistress, and then went from hut to hut knocking peremptorily.

Next came about two hundred wagons and other vehicles, crammed with infantry soldiers. Last of all to stop in front of the school was a huge travelling carriage, probably once the property of an archbishop, drawn by four horses, the Great Mute in the driver's seat: Makhno, Levka, and Karetnik stepped with dignity from this chariot.

Makhno instantly summoned the Revolutionary Committee's staff to hold council with him. By now not a few agitated workers had gathered together before the Revolutionary Committee's truck, shouting to the Chairman within:

"Miron Ivanovich, come and see for yourself—is that what you call Soviet troops—they're simply bandits. . . . Let Auntie Gapka here tell you what they did to her. . . ."

Auntie Gapka was in tears:

"Miron Ivanovich, you know all about me . . . two fellows come blundering into my hut. . . . 'Give us milk, give us lard. . . .' Simply famished giants. 'Take us to your yard, show us the pigsty, the poultry run. . . .' They gobbled up everything, the beasts, the accursed devils. . . ."

The Chairman had to explain in severe tones that since the thing was done—they had called Makhno themselves—it was too late to go back, and now they must devote all their energies to taking the town by storm, and establishing the Soviet Power there. Turning to Auntie Gapka, he shouted:

"Would two boars be enough for you? We'll give you a whole herd . . . only stop spreading dissatisfaction."

Makhno's behaviour at the council of war was exceedingly strange—a mixture of insolence and timidity. He demanded to be made Commander in Chief of all forces, or else his army would turn their horses' heads and return from where they came. He repeated incessantly that there was not another such fighting unit at the disposal of the Soviet Power, and that this unit must be cherished, and not wasted on desultory sallies. He bit his nails continually, thrusting his hand into the front of his jacket every now and then, and scratching himself. It appeared he dreaded nothing so much as Petlura's sixteen guns.

Chugai now addressed him:

"Very well. If it's those guns you're afraid of, I'll ride into town tonight and have a talk with the artillery commander."

"What will you say to him?"

"That's my business!"

"No, it isn't!"

"Yes it is! Who's their commander of artillery? Martinenko. He's one of us—from the Baltic Fleet, used to be a cannoneer on the battleship *Gangut*. He's a countryman of mine, he may even be a sort of relation. He won't fire on us. . . ."

"Lies—all lies!" repeated Makhno, sinking his nails into Chugai's sleeve. But apparently he believed him, for he suddenly calmed down and recovered his dignity.

"Tell us your plan of attack. . . ."

The Revolutionary Committee submitted the following plan to him: A detachment of workers armed with hand grenades was to ford the river under cover of night, and then go one by one to the railway bridge, to attack the enemy at the bridgehead, seize their machine guns, and keep the streets leading to the bridge under fire. When the explosions made by the hand grenades were heard, an armoured train of four trucks, manned by armed workers, and a detachment from the newly-formed peasant regiment, would cross the bridge and attack the principal railway station. The staff of the Revolutionary Committee would at the same time, using telephones and addresses known to themselves alone, inform the district Bolshevik Committees, and the latter would start a rising in the town, the people gathering at the railway station, where the arms brought on the armoured train would be issued. By then the staff would have transferred its centre of operations to the station. Makhno's cavalry was to break through into the town by the footbridge. His infantry was to ford the Dnieper in two columns, above and below the bridge, and reunite at stated points on Ekaterinski Avenue, from which the attack was to proceed upwards for the seizure of municipal departments and the barracks. The success of the rising depended on the rapidity and suddenness of the attack, and therefore the assault must begin this very night.

"The men are exhausted from the march, the horses need shoeing," said Makhno.

To this the Chairman replied:

"The men can rest when we have taken the town, and your horses can be shod with Soviet horseshoes."

And Chugai added:

"Have you camped out in view of the whole town just to rest, Old Man? You'll get it from their six-inch guns, tomorrow, see if you don't! In a word—it's either now or never—attack tonight, or go straight home. . . ."

The Dnieper froze that night, but the ice was unreliable. All night the workers dragged boards to the bank for fording the river, breaking up the leaves of yard gates, and whole fences, and the Chairman and all the members of the Revolutionary Committee worked shoulder to shoulder with them.

The only ones who did not help were Makhno's "Sons," who, armed to the teeth, but not in the least desirous to overwork themselves, strolled up and down the bank, pointing out the sparse lights of the city on the other bank to one another. Ekaterinoslav was great and rich!

About two hours before dawn twenty-four men led by Roshchin let themselves on to the ice. Everything had been explained to them beforehand. Cracking noises were heard from the seams where ice floes had frozen together, and here and there they had to throw down the planks they were carrying. Only once during the crossing was there a flash from the opposite shore close to the vague black pile of the girders of the bridge, and a solitary shot rang out. All lay down on the ice. From this moment they had to crawl, keeping as far as possible from one another.

Roshchin got on to the bank exactly where he had intended, next to a half-submerged barge. From this point a blind alley led up a hill. He followed it, until he came to a turning which took him right to the back of the abandoned freight yard which had been chosen as a rallying point. The lights of the station sent dim rays into it. The town was fast asleep. Roshchin stepped lightly up and down beside the fence for a few moments, repeating over and over again a meaningless sibilant snatch of doggerel. His gaze rested with satisfaction on the high fence, feeling how easy it would be for him to fling his emaciated body across it. The rest of the comrades came stealing up one by one. He ordered them all to jump into the yard and make for the gates, and resumed his light pacing backwards and forwards.

Only twenty-three of the twenty-four had turned up, one must either have lost his way or been captured by a patrol.

With a spring, Roshchin pulled himself up to the top of the fence by his hands, the toes of his boots scrabbling against the boards and, not quite so easily as he had imagined it, flung himself over and landed on a heap of chipped and broken bricks.

Groups of workers were standing by the gate, staring in silence at Roshchin's approaching figure. A few sat on the ground, their faces hidden against their drawn-up knees. It would soon be dawn. These last moments of waiting were decisive and they taxed the nerves most of all—especially for those going into battle for the first time. Roshchin could dimly make out lips set in determined folds, the dry glitter of unblinking eyes. These were honest fellows, confiding, simple, plain-thinking, heavy-handed Russians. They were plunging of their own accord into God knows what dangerous adventures. For the cause of world revolution, as Marusya had said in the little whitewashed candle-lit room. Roshchin was overcome by a sense of exaltation, and felt as light as air. His emotion almost choked him. It was different from anything he had ever experienced . . . unprecedented.

"Comrades," he said, knitting his brows, "if we bring it off this time, and keep calm, further successes will follow. The success of the whole rising depends on us." (The men sitting on the ground got to their feet and came nearer.) "I repeat, there's nothing specially difficult about it—the great thing is to get things done quickly. The enemy fears one thing more than anything else—not weapons, but human beings. If you—you Comrade," he went on, pausing for a moment and looking up at a youth with a strong-looking bare neck. Obeying a strong impulse, he laid his hand on the youth's shoulder, brushing his warm neck. "If you feel chills running down your spine—why, so does the enemy! And the one who believes in his cause will win."

The boy tossed back his head and laughed.

"That's right, what you say, it'll be one or the other of us. They're fools, and we're not. . . . We know what we're fighting for. . ." He jerked his swelling neck away, and his well-formed mouth set in a grimace. "We know what we're dying for. . . ."

Another man pushed his way to the front, asking:

"Tell me this: what am I to do when I've thrown my grenade? I shall be unarmed."

An answer came in a hoarse whisper:

"What are your hands for? Blockhead!"

"I will repeat the whole operation for you, Comrades," said Roshchin. "We will split up into two groups...."

As he spoke he kept looking for the glow of dawn at last to appear in the impenetrable darkness enveloping the Dnieper.... So far it was hidden by thick clouds. But there was no sense in keeping the men in suspense any longer.

"Time to start." He shifted his belt. "Split into groups. Open the gates."

The gates were cautiously opened. They went out one by one, feeling their way in a half-crouching position to the place where the fence came to an end. From here they had a good view of the bridge, outlined against the frozen river. In front of it could vaguely be seen the breastwork of the bridgehead trenches, machine guns upon it, their crews apparently asleep. There was a similar line of trenches on the other side of the railway track.

"Hold your grenades ... now run!"

The twenty-three men rushed forward in a body, silent, at full speed, as if scoring runs in a game of ball. Half of them made straight for the trenches, the other thirteen turned right, towards the railway lines. Roshchin tried to keep up with them. He saw them as long shadows in tightly-belted jackets, leaping high over the embankment. He turned and followed them. He realized that there had been some mistake, they would never be able to reach the second line of trenches before the alarm was given. There was an explosion at his back, wild shrieks, and grenades burst one after another. The first trench had been taken.... Without looking back, breathing in the rasping air through his open mouth, he clambered up the embankment. The thirteen men ahead of him were advancing by enormous leaps ... now they were almost there ... a machine gun belched out flame to meet them like a gigantic, crazed butterfly. A tearing wind seemed to sweep over Roshchin's head.... "Send a miracle, God, miracles do happen!" he said to himself. "Unless there is one we are lost...." He saw the tall lad with the bare neck throw his grenade without first bending down, and all thirteen, unhurt, throw themselves into the trench. All he could see was a conglomeration of bodies, squirming and panting. A bearded man with officer's shoulder straps suddenly

emerged, rising above the rest and slashing wildly with his sword at anyone catching at him. Roshchin fired, and the bearded officer slumped. The next instant his place was taken by another, in an officer's greatcoat, kicking and yelling. Roshchin took hold of him, and the officer, tearing his arm free, clutched at his throat, shouting: "Swine! Swine!", when suddenly his fingers relaxed, and he called out: "Roshchin!"

God knows who he was—somebody from Evert's staff, perhaps. Without a word, Roshchin struck him on the temple with his revolver. . . .

And this trench was taken, too. Roshchin could see the workers turning the muzzles of the machine guns in the opposite direction. And the armoured train crept thunderously over the bridge, to go to the storming of the railway station.

The sun was already high, a flaming ball which emitted no warmth. Once again the armoured train, belching black smoke, crossed the bridge, carrying men and munitions to the captured station. The men accompanied it with cheers from the trenches. Things had gone well. Makhno's infantry had crossed the river over the ice some time before, swarming the steep bank like ants, overturning the police outposts, and scattering along the streets. The firing never let up for a moment, coming now from afar, now from somewhere quite near.

"Run over to the station, Sashko, and find the Commander, and tell him we've been stuck here since five in the morning, and we're cold and hungry, and ask him to have us relieved," said Roshchin to the bare-necked lad. The boy's face, hairless but for the fluffy down on the cheeks, at once courageous and boyish, was covered with bleeding scratches, the traces left on it by a stout machine-gunner before giving up the ghost.

Shivering in his thin jacket, Sashko dashed across the exposed ground, ignoring the bullets which kept whistling through the air, and pursued by shouts of: "You'll be killed, you fool!" . . . "Bring cigarettes, Sashko!" He was soon back, and squatted over the top of the trench, throwing a packet of cigarettes to his comrades, and handing Roshchin a note with a freshly-blurred stamp on it.

"Hold out. Sending you reinforcements. Makhno."

"Marusya sends greetings," Sashko told Roshchin.

Vadim Petrovich gaped in astonishment, looking up from the trench at the squatting Sashko.

"She's a nice girl, Comrade Roshchin, you're in luck...."

"Where did you see her?"

"She's bossing about at the station.... I would never have got through to Makhno, if it hadn't been for her. Oh, boys, you ought to see the crowds there! Everyone clamouring for rifles. Ekaterinoslav is ours!"

Makhno took up his headquarters at the station. The Old Man sat at the refreshment counter amidst artificial palms in the first- and second-class waiting room—the litter of glass dishes was simply swept off the counter on to the floor—writing out orders. Karetnik banged the rubber seal on them. The recipient of these orders rushed off headlong with them. Excited men were perpetually running up with demands for ammunition, reinforcements, field kitchens, cigarettes, bread, medical orderlies.... Sometimes a commander, enraged at having got right up to the Commercial and Industrial Bank and being forced to lie biting impotently at the soil a few yards away from its doors, for want of ammunition, would go right up to the counter, snatch up the grenades dangling from his belt, and throw them in front of Makhno by way of intimidation:

"What are you doing here? Saying your prayers? You cough up some ammunition and be damned!"

Makhno only gave orders to those who demanded them. Ferociously thrusting out his lower jaw, he made believe that it was he who was at the helm, but in reality utter confusion reigned in his head. Making holes in the paper with his pencil, he marked the plan of the city with crosses where troops were advancing or retreating. There was no room to move in this accursed town, its streets were so narrow that the enemy was above, beside, and behind you all the time.... Staring at the plan, Makhno saw neither streets nor houses. He had lost all sense of direction. It was playing in the dark. He had always maintained that towns were dangerous things, the worst of all evils.

And the vagueness of his relations with Martinenko disquieted him. Chugai had assured him that Martinenko would

not fire on his own people. Either they had met last night, or come to an agreement previously, in any case all had been quiet in the artillery park, half of the gun crews had run away, and Martinenko himself, no doubt to drown his embarrassment, had got thoroughly drunk. Only two field guns from his artillery park had been posted at the station, and these were now abandoned by the Petlurites. The delighted Makhno, who had never before captured guns, gave orders for them to be taken to the avenue, actually pulling the cord to release the gunlock himself; a smile wrinkled up his face when the gun roared out, causing bystanders to duck and crouch, as the shell soared moaning over the tops of the tall poplars.

The Revolutionary Committee's headquarters were on the station square. Bonfires were burning there, and workers, arriving continually from all districts, stood around them in groups. The members of the Revolutionary Committee knew almost everyone of them, and where they came from. They called to their comrades in factory and workshop—foundry workers, flour-mill hands, tanners, textile workers—and the workers left the bonfires to form into columns of fifty or so. If a suitable individual was found among them he was appointed commander, if not, the command was taken by some member of the Committee. Rifles were issued, and those who did not know how to use them were given instructions there and then. The detachment received its fighting orders. The commander raised his rifle, shook it and cried: "Forward, Comrades!"

The workers also raised this cherished object which had at last fallen into their hands:

"For the power of the Soviets!"

The detachments departed for Ekaterininski Avenue, and went into battle.

Roshchin pushed his way through the crowd to the Commander and made a detailed report on the occupation of the bridgehead and his casualties—four wounded, one trampled to death. Makhno, biting the end of his pencil, glanced at Roshchin's brown, haggard face, with the stubborn, half-arrogant, half-demented expression.

"Good, you will have a silver watch as a reward," he said, and moved the plan of the town to the edge of the counter.

"Look here!" He joined up the crosses with a pencilled line. "The attack is being held up. We have reached this place—a thoroughfare, a crooked side street, an avenue . . . and further on, where these crosses begin to curve. . . . I want to know the reason—why are we stamping up and down as if we were stuck in a dung heap?" he cried in his shrill, bird-like voice. "Go and find out." He scratched some words on a scrap of paper, and Karetnik, breathing on the rubber stamp dodged under his elbow and slapped it down on the signature. "You can shoot down cowards—I give you the right to do so."

Roshchin went out into the square, where the irregular columns of the workers' detachments were still in process of formation, the shouted words of command blending with cries of hurrah. The smoke from the bonfires, on some of which gruel was being boiled in iron pots, made his head reel, and all sorts of memories floated through his mind: the familiar iron pot of cabbage soup which Marusya, jumping up from the table, took from her mother's hands, and Marusya's teeth nibbling at a bit of fragrant new bread. Ah, well!

Sashko and two others from his detachment followed Roshchin, carrying rifles. One was a pock-marked, jolly fellow, as sturdy as a tub, by the name of Cheezh; the other, a smiling, comely but savage-looking youth, with a bruise over his eye and the peak of his black cap pulled well down over his brows, was a plumber, and gave his name as Robert. They had to pick their way along Ekaterininski Avenue, ducking behind jutting walls as they ran stooping low from one porch to the next. The bullets sang merrily overhead. The avenue was empty, but inquisitive faces looked out of windows, instantly taking cover again behind the mattresses protecting them. A man in a sheepskin coat sat in the entrance of a jeweller's shop—his small, famished-looking countenance was thrown backwards, as if he had lifted it together with his grey beard to the old Jewish heaven, in mute inquiry: "Lord, what is all this?"

"What are you doing here?" asked Cheezh.

"Me?" replied the man mournfully. "I'm waiting to be killed."

"Go home!"

"Why should I go home? Mr. Paprikaki would say: 'What

is more precious—your lousy life, or my shop?' So I might as well die beside the shop. . . ."

They had hardly passed on, when the watchman stuck his beard out of the doorway:

"They're shooting people down over there, young men. . . ."

They got to the corner just as machine-gun fire was grazing the plaster from the walls over their heads. They ran stooping into a side street, turning into a gateway and pressing close against the jamb. Breathing heavily they looked out, and saw seven sprawling bodies and flung-down rifles at the crossing. A workers' detachment must have been mown down here. Robert laughed bitterly, and said, biting off each word:

"They're firing from the attic in the Astoria Hotel. I suggest we liquidate this nest."

The proposal met with approval. The Astoria Hotel, where Roshchin had lived two whole months, was on the other side of the avenue, and could only be reached under fire. Roshchin squeezed his comrades against the gate with outflung arms:

"One at a time, at definite intervals, as quick as you can—no risk whatever."

Crouching so low that he almost fell, he ran up to the corner and lay down beside a dead body. Two shots came from the attic of the Astoria. Leaping up, he ran forward in zigzag fashion, like a rabbit, towards some poplars in the middle of the avenue. There was hasty firing from the attic, but it was too late—he was already in the "dead" zone. Leaning against the trunk of a poplar, he removed his cap, mopped his face, inhaled a breath of air, and shouted:

"You come now, Sashko!"

They had to bang on the plate-glass door of the hotel with hand grenades, before somebody from inside moved a chest of drawers out of the way and opened the door. Robert pushed aside the stout hall porter, ignoring his "Rob, you devil, what are you up to, here?", and sprang forward, brandishing his grenade. The foyer was crowded with the inmates of the hotel, who had come down from the upper floors, but at the sight of a romantic-looking youth waving a grenade, followed by three other armed men, they began silently scuttling up the stairs, panting and squeezing themselves against the balustrade. Going up after them, Roshchin recognized

several. And he, too, was recognized, and would have died a hundred deaths, if looks could have killed. The good-natured landowner, however, the one with the three unmarried daughters on his hands, coming somewhat tardily out of his room, where he had been sitting over a cold repast, almost threw his arms round Roshchin, breathing out fumes of madeira.

"Vadim Petrovich, dear old man!" he exclaimed. "It's only you! And my girls were chattering about some Bolsheviki having burst into the hotel...."

But the words died on his lips at sight of the huge Sashko, with the bleeding scratches on his cheeks, behind him Robert, the plumber with his cap pulled over his black eye, and Cheezh, jolly and red-cheeked, but with an expression that boded ill for a class enemy.

The plumber knew all the ins and outs of the hotel. When they got to the third floor he led them to the back stairs and from there to the attic. The iron door cutting it off from the rest of the house was ajar.... "They're here," he whispered, and throwing the door open he rushed in with such furious haste that it seemed as if he had been waiting for this moment all his life.... When Roshchin, stooping in the semi-darkness to avoid the overhead beams, got to the dormer window, he found Robert thrusting his bayonet into the body of a man in a fur-lined coat, lying prone beside a machine gun....

"I told you so! It's the boss himself!"

As they were coming downstairs again, the boy's nerve suddenly gave out, his lips quivering piteously, and he sat down on a stair, covering his face with his cap. Snatching the rifle out of his hand, Sashko said roughly: "We can't wait for you!" and Cheezh said: "And you call yourself Robert!" The lad jumped up, snatched his rifle back from Sashko, and hurled himself down the stairs, several steps at a time. Vadim Petrovich left him and Cheezh to guard the hotel, sending Sashko to headquarters, with a note asking for a detail to be sent to the Astoria. Then he went back alone to the avenue.

The day was drawing to its close. Workers' detachments had occupied the post office, the town hall, and the Treasury office. Roshchin made the rounds of all these places, and sent messengers from each of them to headquarters. It looked as

if the battle would drag out for some time. Makhno's infantry, its first desperate impulse exhausted, were getting tired of fighting in the narrow confines of the town.... If the fighting had taken place in the steppe, they would long before this have been sharing out the booty and making stew over bonfires, gathering in a circle to watch the dancers flinging out their legs, shod in fine boots drawn from the feet of dead men, in a wild *hopak*. The Petlurites, on the contrary, were recovering from the confusion into which they had been thrown, and, retreating to the middle of the avenue, had entrenched themselves, even counterattacking here and there.

Dusk had begun to fall when Roshchin got back to the station. Makhno was no longer there, having transferred his headquarters to the Astoria Hotel. Roshchin went to the hotel. He had eaten nothing, and only drunk a mug of water, since the previous day. His ankles were beginning to give with weariness, and the coat was a dead weight on his shoulders.

He could not get into the hotel. There were two machine guns at the door, and Makhno's guards, their long hair worn in the Gulyai-Polye fashion low over the forehead, were strolling up and down the pavement with jingling spurs. One of them had flung a fur-lined coat over his short cavalry jacket, to keep out the cold, and another had wound a sable stole round his neck. The guards demanded Roshchin's papers, but it turned out they were illiterate and they threatened to shoot him down on the pavement if he kept on trying to get in. "Go to the devil, you and your Old Man," said Roshchin listlessly, and went back to the station.

There, in the half-dark of the wrecked refreshment room, the tall windows of which reflected the flames of bonfires, he stretched himself out on an oak bench and instantly fell asleep, despite shouts, train whistles, and shots. But jumbled fragments of the day's events kept breaking through his profound weariness. He had borne himself honestly this day. But there had been a blemish. Why had he struck that fellow on the temple? He had been surrendering, anyhow.... Had he done it to cover up his tracks? And then it all came back to him: the cards on the table, the glasses of mulled wine ... and the dead man—Captain Vedenyapin—a fellow who was always on the make.... Roshchin remembered his decayed teeth and the moist lips that looked like a chicken's behind, and were always pursed as if ready to suck up to General

Evert, the army commander who was playing preference. . . . To hell with him—he had done right to strike him. . . .

Sleep wrestled vainly for supremacy with the anxious beating of his heart, and Roshchin opened his eyes, to find himself looking into a sweet, calm face, lit up by the red light coming through the window. He sighed and woke up. Marusya was sitting beside him, holding a mug of hot water and a bit of bread on her knee.

"Here you are—eat!" she said.

That night Chugai and the Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee made their way to the artillery park, now only guarded by Soviet sympathizers. They roused Martinenko from his sleep, and Chugai addressed him as follows:

"We've come to give you a talking-to, Comrade. Nothing could be worse than the way you behaved. . . . Either go straight over to Petlura—though you needn't think we'll let you get there alive!—or get a move on your guns. . . ."

"I can do that—I'll bring them over in the morning. . . ."

"We want them now—not in the morning. . . . Martinenko, Martinenko—you'd lose the kingdom of heaven for a nap. . . ."

"All right, you can have them. . . ."

The next day all the windows in Ekaterinoslav trembled with the roaring of guns. Paving stones, poplar branches, fragments of street-corner booths were flying about the avenue. Inspired by this stern music, workers' detachments, the peasant regiment, and Makhno's infantry, hurled themselves upon the Petlurites and pushed them halfway up the hill. Representatives of all sorts of party and non-party organizations, Paprikaki Junior among them, then made their way, at the risk of their lives, to the Revolutionary Committee's headquarters, carrying white flags and offering themselves as intermediaries for immediate negotiations for a truce and the cessation of civil war.

Miron Ivanovich, in a coat with missing buttons and a greasy cap, sat hunched up over a table in the vestibule of the Astoria, chewing stale bread unaided by a drop of moisture from the saliva ducts, and addressing the delegates:

"It would not be to our interest to destroy the town. We offer you an ultimatum: all Petlura units to lay down their arms by three p. m., and counterrevolutionary gangs to cease

firing from attics. Otherwise, at one minute past three our artillery will open fire on the town."

The Chairman spoke slowly, chewing still more slowly, his face dark with soot. The crestfallen delegates held a prolonged whispered conference, and were about to expostulate, when some people in the most varied and motley attire were observed descending the staircase to the vestibule: two men went in front, each holding a Lewis machine gun in a tight embrace, and behind them came about a dozen bold-faced lads, bristling with arms. Right in the middle was a small man with long hair and the eyes of a damned soul....

The delegates snatched the ultimatum out of the Chairman's hand and hastened out into the avenue, into the open air, beneath the flying bullets.

The ultimatum was rejected by Petlura's command, and at one minute past three Makhno banged with his revolver on the table around which the Revolutionary Military Council was seated, raging and demanding permission to open a ruthless bombardment on the town from converging positions. The idea of destroying the town saddened the members of the Revolutionary Military Council, which was made up of local workers. But it would be no good to show weakness, and it was decided to give the bourgeois a good fright. Martinenko's fourteen guns roared out in ragged chorus. Fragments of brick and plaster began to fly from the walls of some tall buildings, rising skywards in ledges. The representatives of the various committees scuttled like mice from the Petlurites to the Revolutionary Military Council. The attacks of the workers' detachments did not let up. The Petlurites began retreating towards the end of the avenue, right on the hilltop.

On the night of the fourth day of the rising, the Revolutionary Committee declared the Soviet Power in the town.

The Revolutionary Committee sat up all night forming a government. As Miron Ivanovich had prophesied that time in the railway carriage, the anarchists and Left S.R.s made a bloc with Makhno, getting into the meeting under his wing and fighting like madmen for every post. For some reason all the S.R.s were short; but they were sturdy and well-rested, and it was difficult to defeat them in argument.

Each of them, jumping up in his seat, made a point of addressing Makhno with honeyed smiles—it was he who was the true representative of the masses, the legendary leader, the great strategist, the purging flame, the iron broom. . . . And what fine fellows those lads of his were—so gallant, so devoted.

For all answer, Makhno, his pale lips compressed, inclined his drink-sodden face in a series of nods. And the indefatigable S.R. spoke so loud that he could be heard on the other side of the continually opening and shutting door into the corridor, which was crowded with Makhno's followers and people of all sorts who had—God knows how!—made their way into the hotel.

"Comrade Bolsheviks! There is nothing for us to argue about! You're for the Soviets, and we're for the Soviets. We only differ as to tactics. The bourgeois machinery of municipal administration has fallen into our hands. You want to make it a Soviet administration in a single day. But we know the municipal administration will not work with Communists. Sabotage is inevitable. So are famine and destruction. And they would work with us—there's been a resolution of the Duma. That is why we support Comrade Volin's candidature for the post of Commissar of Supplies. I propose closing the discussion and voting. . . ."

The anarchists, up till now maintaining an enigmatic, not to say supercilious attitude, suddenly pulled a trick out of the hat that made even Makhno crane his scraggy neck.

Their representative, a student in a poppy-coloured fez, put forward the candidature of Paprikaki Junior for Commissar of Finances. . . .

"We will use all the means at our disposal to get him appointed. . . . Paprikaki Junior shares our convictions. He is an armchair anarchist, a financial expert, and in our hands he will be a docile and useful weapon for the free people in their revolt. . . . I propose the vote be taken by a show of hands without preliminary discussion. . . ."

Marusya and Vadim Petrovich were seated on the same chair, next to the wall. Squeezing her hands together in her indignation, Marusya kept jumping out of her seat, shouting in a shrill breaking voice: "It's a disgrace!", or "Where were you when we were fighting?", and sitting down in between

these outbreaks with glowing cheeks. She had only an advisory vote.

She had become lean and weather-beaten in the last few days. Her hair was coming down, and she had unbuttoned her sheepskin jacket, which was much too warm. During pauses between speeches she gave Roshchin a hasty account of her adventures. . . . At first she had worked in the commission for keeping the detachments supplied with bread and hot water. Then she had been sent to a medical detachment, and at last, made a messenger. . . . She had rushed all over the town . . . been shot at "a hundred times." She showed Roshchin the holes in the hem of her skirt. . . .

"It I weren't so nimble I would be a goner now. Somebody shouted: 'Marusya!' and I jumped aside, and just where I'd been a moment before, a grenade exploded—bang! bang! But I was safe behind a poplar. . . . I got such a fright, my knees still tremble."

Marusya had enough vitality for a dozen risings. While she was chattering, the scratched face of Sashko, who had had difficulty in getting into the room, appeared in the doorway. He beckoned to Marusya and when she ran up to him whispered something in her ear which made her fling up her hands.

Chugai was booming away, opposing the various candidates:

"Comrades, we haven't met to argue, or to prove our point—we have met to give orders. . . . And the side which has the strength will give the orders. . . ."

Hardly able to wait for her turn, Marusya ran up to the table and gave her information:

"Wholesale looting is going on in the town. Listen to what the comrades have to tell us—they won't let them in! They twisted their arms. . . ."

Just then there was a noise and scuffling at the door, accompanied by loud voices, and Sashko and a few workers armed with rifles burst into the room, all shouting at once:

"What's the meaning of this? You've set police at the door! Go out and see for yourselves. . . . The whole avenue is surrounded, Makhno's lads are breaking into the shops . . . they're taking away stuff by the cartload. . . ."

Makhno thrust out his lips as if he were going to bite. . . . He rose from the table and went out. . . . The Makhno lads in

the corridor and vestibule retreated before him when they saw him showing his teeth, yellow as the fangs of an old dog. He did not have to go far—there were shadows busying themselves before the windows of a big shop on the other side of the avenue. Hardly had he stepped out of the hotel into the street, when Levka appeared before him.

"What's the matter—what's all the hullabaloo about?" asked Levka, staggering.

"Where were you, you blackguard?" shouted Makhno.

"Me? My sword is blunt . . . thirty-six with this hand alone . . . thirty-six.

"You make order in the town!" squealed Makhno. He gave Levka a violent push in the chest and ran across the road to the shop. After him came Levka and a few of his guards. But over there they had guessed it was time to make themselves scarce, and the shadows in front of the window had vanished, leaving only a few persons far away, stamping heavily as they ran off with their bundles. The guards, however, managed to catch unawares one of Makhno's lads—a fellow with a huge moustache—and drag him from the shop. He whined out that he had gone there to see how the accursed bourgeoisie drank the blood of the people. Makhno shook all over as he looked at him, and when more spectators ran up in curiosity from the other side, where the hotel was, he shook his fist in the man's face.

"He's a notorious counterrevolutionary agent . . . you shan't go on with your black deeds! Cut him down and have done with it."

The fellow with the big moustache howled out: "Don't!" Levka drew his sword, grunted, breathed out gustily, and struck with all his might at the man's neck.

"Thirty-seven!" he said boastfully, stepping back.

Makhno began kicking furiously at the twitching body in the pool of blood flowing over the pavement.

"That's how all such will be treated . . . the orgy of marauding is over . . . over, I say!"

Turning sharply on his heel he faced the crowd, which instantly retreated.

"You can go quietly to your homes."

Marusya suddenly fell asleep on the chair, leaning on Roshchin's shoulder, her dishevelled head drooping against his chest. It was past six in the morning. A glum-looking

elderly hotel employee, who had changed his frock coat for an old worn frogged jacket in honour of the establishment of Soviet Power, served tea and big hunches of white bread. The government had already been formed, but there were many urgent questions still unsettled. The railway workers, for instance, had been waiting since the previous evening for an answer to the inquiry: who was to pay their wages, and what were the rates to be? Makhno, supported by the anarchists, proposed the following formula: the railway workers themselves to fix the prices of tickets, collect the money, and pay themselves their own wages....

But the debate had hardly got under way, when the window glass shook in the smoke-laden room, and a dull explosion was heard. Martinenko, who was asleep on a sofa, uttered a lowing sound. The glass shook again. Martinenko woke up: "Damn them and their fooling!" he cried, slapping his cap on his shaven head. A third heavy explosion was heard. Chugai and the Chairman, putting down the bread in their hands, exchanged anxious glances. Levka and a cavalryman, hatless, and shaking his head from side to side like a bear, came bursting into the room.

"We're lost!" said the cavalryman, waving his hand in the neighbourhood of his ear. "The entire squadron is lost."

"They're at Dievka!" shouted Levka, his cheeks shaking. "You sit there talking, Old Man ... Colonel Samokish has come up with seven detachments. They're firing heavy guns on the station...."

In spiteful joy now, quite openly, no longer hiding behind mattresses, the dwellers on Ekaterininski Avenue watched from their windows the withdrawal of Makhno's army. The riders tore along, lashing out right and left with their whips, their fur coats, Cossack cloaks, hussar capes and silk coverlets streaming behind them in the wind.... The horses, weighed down by their bulging saddle bags, stumbled on the road, which was slippery with ice, horse and rider and booty frequently rolling to their destruction beneath the oncoming hoofs.... "Aha!" came from the windows, "Another!" Carts loaded with plundered goods galloped past; four-in-hands, sweeping everything before them, rushed forward so violently that the sparks scattered from beneath the horses'

hoofs. Infantrymen who had been too late to get into a cart, raced by....

This cavalcade hurled itself, shrieking, thundering and clattering, up the avenue, towards the hilly parts of the town, for Colonel Samokish had already seized the railway bridge and the station ... it was said that Makhno, running out of the hotel, stamped in impotent wrath, and flung himself weeping into the cart which Levka had driven up to the hotel, covered his head with his sheepskin coat—either out of shame, or to prevent recognition—and fled in an unknown destination, anywhere to get out of this accursed town.

Makhno's army, fleeing without firing a shot, unexpectedly came up against Petlurite outposts, was thrown into a panic, and turned the horses' heads towards the Dnieper, to certain ruin. The bank was very steep at that place. Breaking up bushes and fences, rolling over and over, carts and all, the Makhno men tumbled on to the ice. But the ice was thin and began to give and crack, and men, horses and carts were soon struggling in the black water amidst the ice floes. Only a small part of Makhno's army—the merest fragment—reached the left bank.

Many workers from the newly-formed detachments had asked permission that night to go home, to warm themselves, change their boots, and have something hot to eat. Only the patrols and the men of the peasant regiment, who had nowhere to go, remained under arms. This peasant regiment was fated to bear the entire weight of the attack of Colonel Samokish's troops. It was surrounded not far from the square in front of the station and almost entirely demolished in a bayonet charge. Very few managed to fight their way back and escape through communicating backyards to their villages, there to tell of the terrible battle, in which three hundred good lads, who had gone to Ekaterinoslav to establish Soviet Power, had laid down their lives.

The members of the Revolutionary Committee, led by Miron Ivanovich and Chugai, had rushed out to rally the workers' detachments and collect the patrols. They had no hope of holding the town, the whole problem was to enable all who had taken part in the rising to cross to the left bank by the footbridge. The rallied detachments hid behind the corners of houses, uprooted paving stones and barricades, pouring out machine-gun fire on the oncoming Petlurites.

Workers with their wives and children came running from all directions to the bridge, over which they rushed, carrying wretched belongings which could have been abandoned without the slightest regret. They were fired upon from roofs, and from below, from the bank of the river.

Chugai, Miron Ivanovich, Roshchin, Marusya, Sashko, Cheezh and a handful of comrades were the last to retreat. Dragging a machine gun with them, they darted from corner to corner, from cover to cover. Now the high grey caps of Samokish's men were beginning to appear not far from the approach to the bridge. The hardest stage of all was still to come—to get on to the bridge, where there was no cover whatever but dead bodies and abandoned bundles.... Chugai turned the machine gun and lay down behind its shield, keeping Sashko with him, and shouting to the rest: "Run like mad!" They ran to the thunder of the machine gun, which seemed to be turning molten in the hands of the gunners.

In the very middle of the bridge Marusya stumbled, and went on with heavy, uncertain steps.... Roshchin caught her up and supported her with his arm. She looked at him in surprise, made as if to say something, but instead just looked at him. Stooping down, Roshchin picked her up in his arms as if she were a baby. She clung to him, getting heavier and heavier. At last they were at the end of the bridge, but just then Vadim Petrovich felt as if an iron rod struck him on the thigh. He could hardly keep his feet, and it was all he could do not to drop Marusya, and cause her injury. Chugai came running up from behind. "I'll drop her," said Roshchin to him. "You take her...." And at that moment his cap was knocked off and the world went dark before his eyes. Just before he fainted away he heard Chugai's voice: "We can't leave him, Sashko...."

* XVI *

The Robbers was not performed till February, during the short breathing space enjoyed by the Kachalin Regiment. The long marches through frost and blizzards, when, instead of warm quarters for the night, nothing awaited them but a sombre sunset glow beneath the clouds, and it was impos-

sible to find firewood in the snowy steppe, to warm one's frozen body by a campfire; the continuous fighting, early-morning alarms, and brief, fierce engagements with Cossacks, were things of the past. Mamontov, with the remnants of his battered regiments, was far away across the river Don. His army was melting away. Nobody believed in him any more: he had sacrificed tens of thousands—the cream of the Don Army—in three offensives against Tsaritsyn—and all in vain.

The Kachalin Regiment having occupied the big village, which had gone over to the Reds without a struggle, felt very cheerful, eating their fill and sleeping warm. Spring was in the offing and with it, perhaps, the end of this protracted warfare.

The six weeks of the strenuous march had worn Dasha out, and it had never occurred to her to take up work on the play again. The theatrical properties were scattered, several members of the company were wounded, and the very book of the words was lost. What Dasha wanted was to spend a few evenings in the warm with Ivan Ilyich, to sit close to him, neither speaking nor thinking, whiling away the twilight peace to the accompaniment of the unwearying song of the familiar cricket beneath the stove.

There were clothes to be washed and mended, and Ivan Ilyich's felt boots must be sent to be patched. She would have to look after her appearance, for her husband, and everyone else, including even herself, were beginning to forget she was a woman. The first evening Dasha and Agrippina came back over the frozen meadows from the bathhouse, their hot steaming cheeks fanned by the light, frost-laden breeze was pure bliss. Together they prepared the samovar, and got the supper ready. Ivan Ilyich and Ivan Gora had also returned from the bathhouse, and they all four sat down to table, the men grunting their pleasure—the cabbage-soup smelt so good, the fragrance from the samovar was so delightful!

"Here we are, Ivan Ilyich," said Ivan Gora. "Rest after work...."

But there was to be no rest for Dasha. The next day, just before Ivan Ilyich's time for coming home, Anisya arrived with a book—a volume of Schiller. Grave and reserved, she said, lifting her dreamy eyes:

"I'm miserable, Darya Dmitrevna. . . . Perhaps I'm spoilt. . . . Everyone else is just ordinary, but I'm spoilt. . . . I've been

like that ever since I was quite little ... but it all ended in marrying early and having children ... and then came my great grief. ... I'm twenty-four, Darya Dmitrevna. What shall I do when the war is over? Go and live in a hut with a peasant, and stare out of the window at the empty steppe? After all that I have seen and heard, I need something different. ..."

Beneath her greatcoat Anisya's breast heaved, and she half closed her eyes.

"I've read this book all through, I never parted with it, even in battle. Perhaps I'm not properly class-conscious, I'm ignorant, uneducated—but all that can be put right. All sorts of voices are speaking in me, Darya Dmitrevna. ... I don't know much about myself, but I know all about other people. I want to weep when I think what I could say about that Countess Amalia. ... She'd step alive right out of the pages of this book. ... Poor Sharigin told me the same thing. ... Darya Dmitrevna, we found a place today—the school—it will seat three hundred. ... And there are carpenters here, and we can get wood and canvas. ... Why shouldn't we act *The Robbers*? We remember our parts. ... The fellows were talking about it only today ... they say they need a good laugh. ..."

Ivan Ilyich entered just then, and, of course, was delighted.

"A splendid idea! We shall be here about a week. ... It would be a fine treat for the boys!"

Ivan Ilyich was a remarkable man—nothing could tame his high spirits: Dasha was at his side, and they were both going full steam ahead towards happiness. ... Just as they had been on those far-off, blue, breezy June days on the steamer. ...

And so Dasha was not able to sit listening to the beating of her beloved's heart in the twilight, creeping with catlike cautiousness towards his most secret thoughts. ... And had he any secrets, after all? And if he had, what are they to you, Dasha? Ivan Ilyich was simply a big-hearted man, and all that was in him—all—was for her to take if she liked. His very face, coarsened by frost and wind, was as simple as the sun itself. ... Ah, how different everything would be if another life, flesh of his flesh, were nestling within the fragile darkness of Dasha's thin body. ...

The company began rehearsing. It was sheer torture. Dasha shed secret tears, and the actors avoided each other's glances

from sheer shame. All had become so coarsened, so harsh, their voices roughened by the cold.... Sapozhkov came to the rescue with a lecture on the origin of the theatre, in which he proved that drama is not lacking even in the lives of birds and beasts. There was the vixen, for instance, who, after catching a mouse, went through a veritable dramatic performance in front of her cubs—pouncing, lying flat on her belly, walking on her hind legs, wagging her tail.... The company cheered up and things began to go a little more smoothly. A stage was knocked together in the schoolroom, and back cloths painted. Footlights consisted of a row of floating wicks in saucers. The frock coats and dress coats which Ivan Ilyich had requisitioned from a visiting lawyer while the regiment was still at the farmstead, and which were thought to have been lost in the march, unexpectedly turned up among the baggage.

At last the day came: hardly had the sun set below the horizon when a Red Army man on a grey artillery horse rode through the village blowing a brass trumpet (this was the idea of Ivan Ilyich) and shouting: "Citizens and Comrades, the performance of Schiller's *Robbers* is about to begin...."

The whole village rushed to the school. There was such a storming of the porch and the entrance to the hall that people were propelled into it with starting eyeballs, their caps and buttons missing.... Those who failed to get in wasted no time on regrets. A new moon hung over the village in the profound sky which seemed to be heralding the spring, and soon the sound of accordions filled the air in front of the school. The Red Army men impressed the Cossack women in the village which had just recognized the Soviets, by singing their favourite song: *An angel flew over the midnight sky....* Acquaintances were rapidly formed, and the air rang with jokes. "Eyes are made for tender glances, lips are formed for kisses," "marrying, for a soldier, isn't like sneezing—it can wait...."

At first the audience roared with laughter when, beneath the old man's make-up, the tow locks, the loose robes made from priests' vestments, they recognized Red Army man Vanin. "It's him!" they shouted. "Go it, Vanin, fire away—don't be shy!" When, from a lair in the wings there crept out with shambling gait a man in baggy swallow tails, and women's

stockings, showing his teeth and glaring, as he hissed like a serpent: "It is I, Father—your faithful son, Franz!", the audience immediately knew him for Kuzma Kuzmich, and laughed till they almost fell.

In the wings, Dasha, clutching at her temples, said over and over again to Sapozhkov:

"This is the end, it's a flop, I knew it would be...."

But the actors overcame the hilarious mood in the hall. The audience had recognized everyone, and settled down to listen. Latugin, approaching the row of smoking wicks, which lit up from below his powerful countenance, with the gummed-on sheepskin beard and frantically curved eyebrows, his arms pressed so hard against his chest that the lawyer's black frock coat gave at the seams, said in a robust voice:

"Oh, if I could summon the whole of nature to rise—air, earth, and ocean—and hurl warfare upon this vile breed of jackals...!"

The audience fell silent, realizing what the play was working up to.

The scenery was never changed, and there were no special sets. Sergei Sergeyeovich thrust his head out between the curtains before every scene, announcing with a smile that was fraught with meaning:

"Scene three. The luxurious palace of Count Moor. The fragrance from the garden is stealing through the windows. The beautiful Amalia is seated in her bower...."

Then this face disappeared, and the curtains were drawn apart. It never entered into anyone's head to identify the angry beauty in her wide skirts and gay kerchief crossed over her breast, rosy, curly-haired, wide-eyed, with Anisya Nazarova of Company 2.

She spoke in a low, trembling, almost singing voice, banging on the table with her little fist at Franz: "Out of my sight, villain!", and the play went on and on like a fairy tale told of a winter evening by a grandfather, the listening children's heads hanging down from the ledge of the stove....

Kuzma Kuzmich feared the place where Amalia had to strike him on the cheeks. For all her dreaminess, her hand was that of a warrior. "Not too hard!" he tried to whisper to her, but she, exclaiming with all her heart: "Oh, shameless perjurer!", brandished her arm as if the whole weight of her past was clenched in her hand, and struck him such a

blow that he bounced into the wings. But nobody laughed. There were cries of: "That's the way!" from the audience, and everyone clapped, for everyone would have liked to lam into the villain himself.

Then she tore the beads from her neck, throwing them on the ground and trampling on them:

"Wear gold and silver, you who are rich! Gorge yourself at your banquet tables, rest your limbs on the soft couch of lust! Karl! Karl! I love thee. . . ."

Sergei Sergeyevich, pulling aside the curtain, appeared smiling, and saying significantly: "Interval." Anisya, seeking Dasha out in the wings, buried her face in Dasha's bosom, shaking all over, and exclaiming:

"Don't praise me, don't, Darya Dmitrevna, don't!"

After this the play went on of its own impetus. In the first act the performers had sweated freely, but now their tense muscles had relaxed, their strained voices become human, and if they could not catch the hissing prompter's whisper of Sergei Sergeyevich, they calmly supplied their own speeches, which were quite as pointed as those written by Schiller, and a great deal more comprehensible.

The audience was highly satisfied with the show. Telegin, seated in the front row, next to the Commissar, several times found himself on the verge of melting into tears. Ivan Gora, whose position imposed self-control on him, breathed heavily, the way he did during some successful military operation. But the actors were the most satisfied of all—they were in no hurry to take off their costumes, or remove their make-up, and would have willingly given another performance, despite the fact that the cocks were crowing lustily in the village.

The holiday was over. The songs and the strains of the accordion had died down, and the only sounds were the occasional banging of a wicket gate. Even the cocks had stopped crowing. The village was asleep. Anisya strolled slowly along the street, Latugin, his greatcoat slung over one shoulder, for he was still hot, walked at her side.

"It's a strange thing, Anisya," he was saying. "There you go in that shell of yours, your greatcoat, and I can see right through it to yourself. . . . Ordinary words don't suit, and I don't want to use them when talking to you. . . ."

They went to the very end of the village, to the place where the steppe merged with the dark horizon. The moon

was high in the darkening heavens. All the time the foot-lights still twinkled before Anisya's eyes, in the stifling, breath-laden atmosphere of the auditorium, every word she had uttered had met with an energetic response, deep sighs had floated up to her, and there had been something profound, hitherto unknown, feminine, in this force within her. It gave her pleasure to listen to Latugin's words:

"I've known many women, my angel...to hell with the lot of them ... but I've never met one like you before.... I'm up to my ears in love, and I don't care who knows it."

He halted, and she halted too. He put his arms round her, and his greatcoat slipped from his shoulder on to the snow. He kissed Anisya long and passionately on her cool lips. Then, stepping back, he looked into her impassive face with the fixed beet-stained blush on the cheeks. She was not looking at him, her made-up eyes were gazing at the moon.

"This is where my torment begins!" he sighed. "Oh, well...."

He picked up his coat and they went on again....

Dasha could not sleep that night. Planting her elbow in the pillow, she said:

"I know it can't be done just now ... but listen—we have Anisya, we have Latugin. Kuzma Kuzmich—that's a real talent. He could be Iago.... We'll give *Othello*.... We'll fill up the company—you can give an order in the regiment tomorrow ... you'll see we'll act for the division, for the whole corps.... But first and foremost we must keep our scenery together.... Speak to the Commissar, he can give us special carts for it.... How the men listened! The audience seemed to me like a sponge absorbing art...."

"You're absolutely right," said Ivan Ilyich. His hands clasped at his back, his shirt flowing, he began pacing backwards and forwards in the soft slippers Dasha had purchased from a Cossack woman. Each time he passed, his great dark figure shut out the light from the wick on the table, and somehow Dasha could not bear this. And when he got to the window and turned, and the rays of the lamp fell on his rather red, smiling face, looking as if its strong lines were cast in bronze, her heart beat wildly.

"You're quite right.... Russians love the theatre.... Russians have a special *flair* for art. An extraordinary sort of

demand, a regular thirst. . . . Just think—after six weeks of fighting, people worn down to skin and bone, you'd say a dog couldn't survive what they've been through . . . what do they want with Schiller? And today it was like a first night at the Art Theatre, in Moscow. Take Anisya now! I never saw anything like it—she's a born actress. What movements, what nobility . . . what passion! And to crown all—a beauty!"

Waving his arms, he again crossed the light, and Dasha said:

"Couldn't you stop walking up and down the room, Ivan?"

There was a note of irritation in her voice that he had not heard for a long time; her elbow still planted in the pillow, she was staring in front of her, a shade of darkness in her eyes. Ivan Ilyich stopped abruptly, and walked up to the bed, sitting down on the side of it. He was openly afraid.

"Ivan!" (She, too, sat up in bed.) "Ivan, there's something I've been meaning to ask you for a long time." She passed her finger tips rapidly across her eyes. "It's very hard to ask you; but I can't go on like this any longer. . . ."

His face told her that he understood what this question was, but she came out with it just the same, having repeated it to herself a thousand times.

"Aren't I a woman to you any more, Ivan?"

His shoulders went up and he muttered something inarticulate, clutching at his head. Dasha cast a piercing glance at him, there was still a shred of hope left in her. . . . Could it be this was her sentence?

"Dasha, Dasha, can't you understand? You must try to be generous."

"Generous?" (Here it came—her sentence!)

"Oh, Dasha, I love you so. . . . Perhaps you hate me. . . . but I don't see why you should, after all. . . . Perhaps some sort of instinctive repulsion? That's a thing I can well understand. . . . I loved you once and for all. . . . whether it's hard for me, or easy, that doesn't matter, I assure you. . . . you're as close to me as my own heart. . . . so don't worry about anything, just live and be happy. . . ."

Dasha shook her head as she listened, and he forced himself to go on, frowning:

"Somehow I always used to imagine your poor little feet—how weary they had got in the search for happiness, and all in vain, in vain. . . ."

Dasha stuck her thin bare legs out of the blanket, jumped on to the earth floor and ran across to blow out the light on the table.

Ivan Gora, returning from the show with Agrippina, lighted a rushlight and began looking through the heap of papers which had accumulated in the course of the day. It was his invariable habit to put them all in order before going to bed. Agrippina sat apart from him on a bench near the door, without removing her coat or cap.

"You didn't do badly, either," he said, yawning and scratching his neck. "I couldn't quite make out what you were chirping about there, you had only a very small part. But Anisya, oh, Anisya!" Dipping his nose close to the light and chuckling, he looked through the papers. "Perhaps she flirts her skirts about too much, as you wenches call it... she feels there's a man in the offing... she's a bit that way inclined—she needs looking after... do you suppose the revolution hasn't brought plenty like her to the top? That's just it... everything is based on precisely that... the people are not mediocre, not they... a gifted people... our way of fighting is too extravagant... we need machinery.... Read this—" He glanced through a letter. "'We took the tank with our bare hands...' it's barbarous! If I had a son I'd brand it on his chest, the ninny: remember, to whom you owe your happiness, never forget whose bones it is that are whitening in the steppe...."

Agrippina, leaning against the wall with closed eyes, her mouth shut in a tight line, was brooding on the most painful of all her memories. Ivan Gora lying in the steppe at night, motionless, not breathing, and she determined to stay beside him whether he was alive or dead. There had been only one round of cartridges left in her rifle.... She had refused to go away with the rest—*she* had not left him alone in the steppe that night... a pity her bones had not been whitening there ever since.

"Why don't you go to sleep, Agrippina?"

Shielding his eyes from the flame of the candle, Ivan Gora looked across at her—tears were streaming from beneath her tightly closed lids, and falling in great drops from her long lashes, while her black eyebrows were lifted high.... He put

the papers away in his field pouch, went up to Agrippina, and squatted down in front of her:

"What's the matter, goosie? Tired?"

"Brand his chest, go on, teach him about the whitening bones. . . ."

"What's the matter with you, Agrippina?"

She replied in a desperate, girlish voice:

"I'm two months gone . . . and you never notice anything . . . you think of nothing but Anisya, Anisya. . . ."

Ivan Gora sat right down on the floor at Agrippina's feet. His mouth hung open foolishly. . . .

"Agrippina, is it true? Agrippina, what joy—are you really going to have a baby? My dear one, my own dear Agrippina. . . ."

When she heard him speak thus she said, this time in a low, womanly voice:

"Go on with you—get out of my sight. . . ."

Leaning towards him, she put her arms round him, and rested against him, still sobbing, each sob getting shorter and fainter than the one before.

The third rout of Ataman Krasnov at Tsaritsyn was the signal for increased liveliness throughout the Southern Front—that is to say, the 8th, the 9th, and 13th armies, which barred the way to the Don and the Donbas. The once hostile Cossack population appeared to be ready to forget their hostility, only anxious to hang up their saddles in their sheds (and may the pigeons sully them!), to wrap oily rags round their rifles, and bury them deep in the earth. Who the hell was it that said one couldn't live under the Bolsheviks? The earth had not run away—there it was, smoking on the bare mounds beneath the spring sunshine—and they had their hands, and the horses seemed to be asking for the collar, the bullocks for the yoke. . . .

The Red Commander in Chief at Serpukhov was urging for an offensive as soon as possible. The original, faulty plan had been somewhat modified and the army was being reorganized in the course of operations: instead of moving southeast, to the Don, the Red armies, held up by roads which the thaw had made impassable, were to have turned southwest, towards the Donets. But it was too late for this, now: the way to the proletarian Donbas, the highway of the revolution, was firmly closed. During these two months of

marking time, Mai-Mayevsky's division, breaking into the Donbas, had been strongly reinforced by Volunteer units withdrawn from the North Caucasus after the 11th Red Army had been scattered far and wide over the Astrakhan sands. By this time there were fifty thousand crack troops on the right bank of the Donets, under the command of Mai-Mayevsky, Pokrovsky and Shkuro.

Spring came with a rush. The snow melted instantly beneath the rays of the shaggy sun, the gullies in the steppe were filled with rushing blue torrents, the Donets swelled to vast proportions and there had never before been such an enormous area of flooded meadows. Since the railway lines ran north and south in these parts, the regrouping had to be done along rough roads and pathless wastes. The army trains stuck in the clinging mud, and fell behind their units. All this delayed and slowed down the regrouping. The bridges across the extensively flooded Donets were in the hands of the Whites. The offensive became a series of long drawn-out battles. And just then, in the rear, in the village of Veshenskaya, which had not long since gone over to the Reds, a determined and bloody Cossack revolt flared up—the work of Denikin's agents. Agitators, funds and arms were flown to the village on White airplanes.

The 10th Army, which constituted the left flank of the Southern Front, continued, unsupported, following the orders of the Commander in Chief, to move south along the main railway line, hurling back and wiping out the remnants of Krasnov's units.

The Tenth Army was heading for destruction.

It hurt the eyes to look southwards at the steppe—from which the breeze came laden with fragrance—when the sun's rays were reflected in pools, in streamlets and in the sheets of flood water. Flocks of birds flapped across the translucent blue depth of the sky, cranes soaring by in wedge formation, emitting trumpet calls, and men and women standing on a step of a railway carriage would throw back their heads and follow them out of sight. Whither, ye free ones? To the Ukraine, Polesye, Volhynia, and still further. . . . To Germany, across the Rhine, to your old nests. . . . Hi, ye cranes, take our good will to all good people, tell

them, as you balance on one red leg on the roof, tell them that you have flown over Soviet Russia and seen the ice break there, and the rivers overflowing their banks, tell them there has never been such a spring before—so violent, so tempestuous, so fertile. . . .

Dasha, Agrippina, Anisya, reeling from sunlight and wind, often met on the back platform of the railway carriage. The troop train was moving south, and spring was flying to meet it. The men were going about with nothing over their shirts, which they wore unbuttoned at the neck. The thunder and clatter of battle every now and then came to their ears from the horizon ahead of them—this was the leading units of the Tenth Army driving the last bands of insurgent villagers from the farmsteads. Velikoknyazheskaya was taken without much difficulty. When they had passed it, the Kachalin Regiment left the train on the shore of the river Manich, and took up their positions at the front.

The Salsk steppe, over which in spring the turbid waters of the Manich cover the tops of the reeds, extends flat and deserted like the greenish expanse of a frozen ocean. Here, in olden times, arrows flew across the Manich from one bank to the other, Asiatic nomads waging war against Scythians, Alani and Goths. Here came the Huns to lay waste the land right up to the North Caucasus. Here, seated in front of their felt tents, Kalmucks listened to the ancient legends of the bogatyr Manas. The steppe was at its luxuriant best in spring, when the earth, its thirst assuaged, hastened to clothe itself in grass and flowers; the limpid sunset glow suffused the sky over the Black Sea; huge stars blazed right up to the horizon; and the burning sun rolled up from beyond the Caspian.

The headquarters of the Kachalin Regiment was housed in the sole habitable premises to be found in this desert—a reed-thatched clay hut behind the fence of an abandoned pound. There was no sign of the enemy in its neighbourhood, and the army patrols went further and further—some going towards Tikhoretskaya in the south, and others as far as Rostov in the west. It was difficult to get it into the men's heads that a hard fight lay ahead of them, and that they had not come here just to get fish out of the Manich with hand grenades, and waste expensive cartridges on duck-shooting in the evening glow. The army had been sent to the enemy's

rear, and this enemy—though yet untried—was certainly no contemptible amateur force.

Returning from divisional headquarters one day, Ivan Gora sent for Ivan Ilyich, and together they walked silently along the bank of the river, sat down close to the water, and lit up. The red elliptical disc of the sun was descending below the horizon, veiled by the vapours rising from the earth; all along the Manich the frogs were croaking—croaking loudly, impudently, then moaning, groaning, whistling. . . .

"Spawning, the little beasts," said Ivan Gora.

"Well, what have you found out?"

"Nothing new. General anxiety—everyone understands, and there's nothing to be done: a categorical order from the Commander in Chief to attack Tikhoretskaya. What d'you say to that?"

"It's not my business to argue, Ivan Stepanovich—all I have to do is to obey orders."

"I ask you what you think of it yourself."

"Me? You won't shoot me if I do?"

"You're a funny chap! They all say that . . . a pack of cowards, the lot of you. . . ."

Ivan Gora, pushing back his cap, scratching his head, and then his side, demanded imperatively a like attention. A clod of earth broke off from the bank beneath his feet, falling with a splash into the turbid eddies. The frogs croaked in ecstasies of lust, as if they meant to populate the whole world with their slippery breed. . . .

"So you consider the Commander in Chief's instructions right."

"No, I do not," replied Ivan Ilyich quietly and firmly.

"Aha! You don't! That's good . . . why don't you?"

"We are practically cut off from our reserves, and our supply base, as it is. The enemy has only to snap the line between us and Tsaritsyn at any point, and we're done for. The whole thing has no solid base."

"Go on, go on!"

"For us to attack still further south, at Tikhoretskaya, would mean to put our heads right into the noose. Nothing good can come of it. I could understand it if our army had been sent merely as a diversion, to draw the White forces from the Donbas at all costs. . . ."

"H'm. . . ."

"But that would be an extremely costly experiment—to sacrifice an army for the sake of diversion. . . ."

"So what's your conclusion?"

Blowing out his cheeks, Ivan Ilyich flung the end of his "cigarette" (home-grown tobacco in a screw of newspaper) into the water.

"I haven't come to any conclusion, Ivan Stepanovich. . . ."

"You know very well you have. . . . All right—hold your tongue! It's all as clear as daylight without a word from you. Once you told me, Ivan, about your commissar Gimza—remember how he sent you to the Commander in Chief with secret information about the traitor Sorokin? And now. . . ." (Ivan Gora looked back and lowered his voice.) "I feel like going myself—not to Serpukhov, to the Commander in Chief, but right to Moscow. . . . There must be some bastard there—in the High Command, or the Supreme Military Council, or somewhere. . . . There must be—it's war. . . . We're much too confiding. . . . Just because our thoughts are lofty and our hearts are big, we think the whole world except the bourgeoisie must be good people, and all we have to do is to brandish our trusty blades. I had a good look at Vladimir Ilyich in Petrograd—he has the real Russian eye, narrowed, observant. . . . An enthusiast, a thinker, his hands clasped behind his back under his jacket, striding backwards and forwards, and then suddenly bending his brow and his eye on a man, and sizing him up in a moment. . . . That's what's wanted. . . . I watch every move you make, note every word you say. . . . But you don't watch me, you believe me blindly . . . suppose I give you treacherous orders . . . would you fulfil them without a murmur?"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't. . . ."

"You just said you would: it's not your business to argue. . . . Well, so what would you do?"

"I would try and persuade you. . . ."

"Persuade! Intellectual! You ought to shoot! Oh, my God. . . ."

Ivan Gora placed his big hands over the cap on his head and planted his elbows on his knees. He had not told Telegramin the most important thing, that a telegram from Moscow, from the Chairman of the Supreme Military Council of the Republic, in reply to the anxious enquiry of the Commander of the Tenth Army, had been read the day before at

a Party meeting—a telegram which was supercilious and threatening, categorically confirming the instructions formerly issued. . .

"Here's the latest news for you then: four of General Pokrovsky's divisions, transferred from the Donbas, are concentrating on our right flank, General Kutepov's corps is moving to make a frontal attack, he has already cut us off from Tikhoretskaya . . . he has divined the plan of our Commander in Chief . . . General Ulagai is mustering his cavalry on our left flank . . . and behind us for over two hundred miles is—empty space. . . ."

"It is that which is the decisive factor," said Ivan Ilyich. "If you want my opinion—all our sick and wounded should be evacuated, and everything not absolutely essential at the moment sent to the rear, to leave us unencumbered. We can't hold the Manich anyhow. . . ."

Ivan Gora made no reply . . . then, after a pause, spitting wrathfully into the river, he said:

"For such talk both you and I ought to be hauled up before the tribunal. . . . If you're told to die on the Manich, then die. . . ."

"I don't think I ever refused to do that, and I don't refuse now."

On the 2nd of May mounted patrols from Kutepov's corps made their appearance on the other side of the river. At first there were only small groups of advance riders. They scoured the steppe, stopping every now and then, only to rush headlong over the gleaming pools, pursued by rifle shots. More and more accumulated, approaching the front with ever-increasing boldness; then they dismounted, made their horses lie down, and began firing on the Red advance posts.

On the 3rd of May Kutepov's forces came up amidst the thunder of artillery fire. Concentrating around the railway line, they made persistent assaults upon the bank of the Manich, wave upon wave. Reconnaissance biplanes, differing from both the Russian and German types, flew overhead. Lorries, loaded with pontoons, advanced, scattering water and sand. That very day Kutepov's shock troops broke through and crossed the river at the point where it was held

by the Morozov Division, but were routed by bayonet charges.

Towards evening the lines retreated and entrenched. No campfires were lit. The firing died down on both sides, and night came over the steppe—eternally still, moist, smelling of wild flowers. The impudent frog chorus croaked as if nothing special had happened. Men lying with an ear to the ground even thought they could hear the soft rustle of the grass stirring the sepulchral darkness with its fragile but powerful stems.

A conference was held all night by Ivan Ilyich in the headquarters dugout. The order to attack was impatiently awaited from divisional headquarters, for it was obvious to all that so formidable a foe must not be given a single hour for peaceful manoeuvring and for choosing his own place to strike at the thin line of the Tenth Army, which stretched over almost forty miles, exposed on both flanks and on the rear. The commanders reported on the morale of their units: the Red Army men were in an excited state, could not sleep, whispering was going on in the trenches—if it had been the year 1918 the regiment would have rushed to hold a meeting, threatening to tear their commanders limb from limb if the order: "Forward into action" was not immediately given. A moment comes when it seems as if rage and desperation could sweep away all obstacles.

Company Commander Moshkin entered the dugout, having just crossed the Manich up to his neck in water from the other bank, where a platoon of his company was posted. He was a Tsaritsyn metalworker, and loved military affairs with the passionate zest of a hunter.

"Smells good here, Comrades," he said, screwing up his features in the tobacco smoke, so thick that the candle could barely flicker. He tugged off his boots, hopping first on one, then on the other foot, and poured the water out of them. "My lads wounded a cadet, I hoped to bring him here, but unfortunately he died. . . . Just a young lad, a mere milksop, but no end savage—kept shouting: 'Swine! Beasts!' Our chaps never saw anything like it. . . . And his equipment! The finest cloth and boots and straps . . . talk about Cossacks! The Cossack is a lout, a muzhik, just like one of ourselves—you hit him, he hits you back, and there it ends. . . . But these fine gentlemen are utterly ruthless. The platoon is made up ex-

clusively of officers and the platoon commander is a colonel. They all have wrist watches. I told my boys—'You forget about those watches, you tramps!' I said. 'If I catch you crawling up to the White posts for watches, I'll knock your teeth out for you. . . .'"

Moshkin laughed, exposing a fine set of teeth, his intelligent, plain face, slightly pock-marked, beaming with good humour.

"This is how things are, Comrades: a terrific din in the steppe, we've been hearing it since dusk. I sent out a scout, Stepka Shchhavelev—not a man, but a wonder. . . . He says they've brought up their artillery, and it seemed to him that the infantry has come up in carts. . . . So be prepared, Comrades. . . ."

Ivan Ilyich, overpowered by the tobacco smoke, went out of the dugout for a breath of air. The dazzlingly bright sickle moon rode high over the waning stars. Three women's figures were seated on a hurdle driven into the ground. Ivan Ilyich went over to them. "Orders were given for everyone to spend the night in the trenches," he said. "What does this mean?"

"We can't sleep," said Dasha from above, leaning down to him from her perch.

Dasha, Anisya and Agrippina all looked big-eyed, thin, strange . . . and Ivan Ilyich could not make out whether they were smiling at him, or scowling in a peculiar way.

"We'll wait here till you're finished," said Agrippina.

"Do let me stay with them, Comrade Regimental Commander!" pleaded Anisya.

"Get off the fence at once, what are you doing perching there like hens. . . . Bullets are flying all the time—can't you hear?"

"On the ground there's dung and fleas," said Dasha, "and there's a nice breeze here."

"That's not bullets, it's cockchafers, you can't fool us," said Agrippina.

And Dasha, leaning down again, said:

"The frogs are going mad, we're sitting listening to them."

Ivan Ilyich turned his head towards the river, he had not till now noticed these sighs, rhythmical groans of longing and anticipation, and suddenly the victor, a big-mouthed soloist, three inches long, with bulging green eyes, started his

song, and sang so confidently that the stars themselves seemed to be listening to his praise of life.

"Well done! Bravo!" said Ivan Ilyich, laughing. "All right then, stay where you are, but the moment anything begins take cover. . . ." He put his arms round Dasha's shoulders and drew her towards him, whispering in her ear:

"Isn't everything lovely? And you are, too. . . ."

With a wave of his hand he went back to the dugout. When they were alone again, Anisya said softly:

"If we could stay here forever. . . ."

"Happiness is won with blood," said Agrippina . . . "that's why it's so dear. . . ."

Dasha told them:

"The things I've seen in my life, girls, and everything flew by me, flew by without touching me. . . . I was always waiting for something remarkable, something special. . . . My foolish heart suffered, and made others suffer. . . . Better to love a single night, but properly. . . . To understand everything, to be filled to the brim, to live a million years in a single night. . . ."

She dropped her head on to Anisya's shoulder. Agrippina hesitated, and then she, too, leaned against Anisya, on the other side. And they sat thus on the hurdle for a long time, their backs to the stars.

The new biplanes did the spotting for Kutepov's artillery, circling the sites of explosions, dropping a few bombs on the Reds, and soaring over the steppe like hawks towards the batteries on the horizon, which had opened a powerful bombardment on the Manich at dawn.

The only plane capable of going up in the whole Red division, an old machine, a slow flier, which had served its time in the imperialist war, and been repaired in a homemade fashion in Tsaritsyn, was sent up to intimidate the enemy.

It was terrifying to watch it, with its wooden frame and patched wings, as, contrary to all the laws of aerodynamics, it soared overhead, now emitting loud reports, now almost giving up the ghost. But it was flown by Valka Cherdakov, a pilot famous throughout the Southern Front and very well known to the White aviators, a small apelike man, most of whose bones had been broken at one time or another, leav-

ing him lame and crooked-shouldered, as if stuck together with glue. When he was asked: "Valka, is it true you brought down a German ace in 1916 and flew to Germany the next day to drop roses on his grave?" he would answer in his squeaky voice: "Well, and what about it?" It was a favourite trick of his, after having used up the whole belt of his machine gun, to drop on to the enemy plane from above and strike it with his chassis. "How is it you don't get broken up yourself. Valka?" people would ask, receiving the invariable reply: "Well, and what if I do?"

Everyone cheered up when they saw his airplane, flying low over the steppe, though there was nothing to be cheerful about. High explosive shells were bursting on both banks of the Manich, forcing the Red Army men to stick to the trenches. There were at least six enemy batteries thundering ceaselessly for every Red battery. The enemy lines, the men running from cover to cover, were drawn nearer on an irrepressible impetus.

Valka Cherdakov swooped down, banked, landed not far off, got out of the plane and limped round it. Some Red Army men came running up to Valka, whose whole face was smeared with machine oil.

"What are you staring at?" he said crossly, taking his box of tools and spare parts out of the fuselage of the plane. "Keep the enemy's planes away from me—I've got to work."

The Whites really had noticed him, and three of their planes were beginning to circle over the place where he had landed—at some height, for the Reds were firing at them. Bomb after bomb fell, throwing up fountains of earth. Valka, taking no notice, went on repairing his oil feed. One bomb exploded so near that his plane swayed and clods of earth were scattered on the wings, causing Valka to look up at the sky and shake an admonitory finger. When he had finished his repairs, he shouted to the Red Army men:

"Come over here, wind up the propeller!" and clambered into his seat in the plane. "Not like that, Comrades—it isn't a dame! Don't be afraid of getting hot!"

The engine snorted, gave a deafening grunt, and began roaring; the Red Army men leaped aside, and the plane, swaying, taxied so far into the steppe that it seemed as if it would never take off, before suddenly rising into the air. Valka gained altitude and began looping, in order to make

the unholy combination of petrol and spirits blend in the tank. After looping the loop on a vast scale, he dived straight for the three enemy biplanes, which, however, refusing combat, rapidly made off.

When he had flown as long as he saw fit over the front, Valka Cherdakov came down again, and sent a note to Telegin:

"While over the front, I saw eight new motorcars—it's Denikin and the foreigners I'm certain—you can be sure of this. Two enemy guns have been put out of action. I fired on a column on the march. Am flying to the base for petrol. . . ."

Denikin was at the front. It was little more than a year since, suffering from bronchitis, and muffled in a fur rug, he had jogged by in a cart, in the train of the seven thousand Volunteers who were cutting a bloody path to Ekaterinodar under the command of Kornilov. General Denikin was now fully-empowered dictator of the whole of the Lower Don, the rich Kuban district, the Terek, and the Northern Caucasus.

Denikin took military agents—an Englishman and a Frenchman—with him on this excursion to General Kutepov at the front, in order to make them feel the humiliation and chagrin of having allowed the dastardly surrender of Odessa, Kherson and Nikolayev to the Bolsheviks. If it had only been the regular Red Army which has driven out the French and the Greeks! But a whole Greek brigade had been put to the sword at Nikolayev in the sight of French mine layers, by peasants, guerillas. Had the French, the victors in the world war, given way to panic before Russian peasants, pusillanimously surrendering Kherson and withdrawing two divisions from Odessa? Preposterous! To have allowed themselves to be intimidated by the Moscow Commune! Anton Ivanovich had resolved to show the illustrious Europeans how his army, crowned with the emblem of the laurel and the sword, would demolish the Communists.

He cherished yet another grievance: the decision of the Council of Ten in Paris to appoint Admiral Kolchak supreme ruler of the whole of Russia. What did they see in Kolchak? In 1917 he had torn off his gold sword and flung it from the

bridge of the flagship into the Black Sea. The newspapers in almost all the countries of the world had reported the incident. At that time General Denikin had been incarcerated in the Bikhovsk prison, but the papers had said nothing about this. In 1918 Kolchak fled to the United States and held classes in torpedoing in the American navy—his portrait had been in the newspapers next to those of cinema stars. . . . General Denikin, escaping from Bikhovsk prison, had taken part in the Frost Campaign; standing over the dead body of Kornilov, he had taken up the heavy cross of command and conquered a territory bigger than France. . . . But only some little organ of the Paris gutter press had noted this—giving three lines of print to it, accompanied by a fantastic bewhiskered photograph over the caption "Le Général Denikine." And a notorious self-advertiser, a hysterical megalomaniac addicted to cocaine, had been appointed ruler of Russia.

Denikin had never believed in the ultimate success of Kolchak's arms. When, however, Kolchak's half-baked General Pepelayev seemed to be going to take Perm, and the whole foreign press had proclaimed: "The mailed fist raised over Bolshevik Russia," even Denikin's incredulity had been shaken for a moment, and he suffered at the thought of Pepelayev's success. But Commissar Stalin—he who had twice routed Krasnov at Tsaritsyn that autumn—was sent to the banks of the Kama from Moscow (this the Whites learned through their Intelligence Service), and immediately took radical measures for the rapid organization of defence, dealing the famous Pepelayev a blow that sent him reeling from Perm to beyond the Urals. And Kolchak's present offensive on the Volga was bound to end in the same way—there had been no really serious preparations for it, everything had been done for effect, to the accompaniment of any amount of boosting in the foreign press, and the uproarious delight of the drunken Siberian merchants.

"Our tactics differ somewhat from those which our country and yours, and the Germans, also, employed in the world war. The lines are thinner, and are posted at considerably greater intervals, each platoon fulfilling an independent mission," said Denikin, standing up in the smart new open Fiat and indicating with a white-gloved hand Major General Teplov's rifle brigade, deploying with the precision of parade drill.

Standing beside the Commander in Chief in the car, was a French officer in a sky-blue tunic of the finest cloth, and breeches to match, a velvet cap trimmed with gold braid set at a smart angle, and fitting snugly to his small head; the ends of his silky moustache stuck out on either side of the field glasses through which he was looking; a brandy flask dangled at his side. He was the nattiest Frenchman imaginable! On the running board of the car stood an English officer, also holding field glasses to his eyes, but he was commoner and not nearly so smart—the vast pockets of his khaki tunic were crammed with spools of film, tobacco pouches, pipes, and cigarette lighters; his cap, which he wore pulled flat as a pancake over his brows, was the subject of discussion among the officers in Denikin's suite, who stood at a respectful distance. "Say what you like, but the English don't know how to wear uniform, they're out-and-out civilians! Now take the cap worn by the cavalry guards! Or the way the Tsarskoye Selo hussars in Her Majesty's bodyguard wore their caps! How they swaggered, the dogs!"

Mounted on a Kalmuck stallion beside the car was the none-too-gracious Kutepov. Thickset, with greying hair, he wore an unbuttoned sheepskin jacket; in honour of the parade he had donned gloves and spurs; his small eyes were bloodshot; he had been after that accursed Manich for five days, and was well aware that the deployment of Teplov's brigade for the benefit of these dandies was a show that would cost the brigade dear.

"The special feature of this war is that it calls for extraordinary manoeuvrability," Denikin was explaining. "Hence the enormous importance which cavalry has acquired in our army. Here I have a decisive advantage—the Terek, the Kuban, and the Don will yield me a hundred thousand regular cavalrymen."

"Oh, la-la!" trilled the Frenchman blithely, not removing the field glasses from his eyes.

"The Reds have no cavalry, and no material from which to form it, with the exception of Budyonny's brigade, which gave the unfortunate ex-ataman Krasnov so much trouble. . . ."

"Not so easy to get a hundred thousand saddles and bridles," said the Englishman, speaking through clenched teeth; he, too, did not remove the field glasses from his eyes.

"Yes, that's just it," assented Denikin drily. Much as he

would have liked it, he refrained from blurting out the whole truth to these allies, here and now, amidst his troops, beneath the thunder of artillery (the car was less than a mile from the batteries). He would have liked to tell them that they were shopkeepers, that their whole policy was short-sighted, timid and stingy. . . . It had been proved to them, as sure as twice two is four that Bolshevism was more dangerous to them than two hundred and fifty German divisions. Then give me arms, gentlemen, to the quantity I require, if you are afraid of sending your soldiers to Russia. . . . We can reckon accounts later, in Moscow.

But he could not quite restrain himself, and turned to the interpreter, trying to keep within the bounds of courtesy, but speaking without unnecessary geniality.

"If I don't have enough saddles," he said, "I'll make the Cossacks ride bareback. Mind you make them both understand," he added turning to the interpreter.

But instead of translating Denikin's words, the interpreter, a youth of a definitely southern type, obliging to the point of servility, drew in his breath in a gasp of horror. At the same moment Kutepov jerked up his horse's head and thrust his spurs into its side, shouting:

"Get under the car at once, gentlemen!"

In the din of battle, no one had noticed that a clumsy yellow airplane was flying straight at the car. There had not even been time to fire at it, so swiftly had it swept upwards. Leaning out of it, the small, tousle-headed Valka Cherdakov flung down two hand grenades; one fell straight on to the bonnet of the splendid Fiat, the other quite near. . . . Then, showing his white teeth in a wide grin, he climbed steeply into the sky.

But General Denikin and the English and French officers had had time to throw themselves under the car, though it had been particularly difficult for Denikin to get there, with his paunch and thick greatcoat. They all got off with nothing worse than a fright. The suite scattered in all directions, and General Kutepov, too, had managed to gallop to safety.

The Volunteers attacked with unprecedented fury, moving on the Manich in ever fresh lines and leaving many behind them prone on the level steppe. They appeared here,

there and everywhere under grazing fire from light machine guns, stooping, running, and gathering on the opposite bank of the river. Telegin ordered the regimental colours to be brought out of the dugout, and the sheath removed.

The decisive moment had arrived. The White artillery shifted its fire on the reserves of the Kachalin Regiment, raising a solid bank of earth where the shells fell. Torrents of lead came pouring from the opposite bank. The last lines of the Volunteers ran forward, without pausing to lie down between their rushes. The machine-gun fire ceased instantly, and men hurled themselves by the hundred into the Manich with a fury which made the very waters seethe. Brandishing their rifles, they plunged across the river breast-high and up to their necks in the water, swimming, leaping convulsively into the air when struck by a bullet, struggling, drowning, while ever fresh contingents crawled over the bodies of the fallen. . . . The river was only about two hundred feet wide at this place. Machine-gun fire was powerless to stop the progress of the frenzied yelling men. . . . But if Major General Teplov, waving his sword and shouting: "On! On!" from the rushes on the opposite bank counted on the terrific impetus of the attack spreading panic among the Reds, and putting them to flight, he was out in his reckonings.

The Kachalin men had been waiting all day for this moment and those who had been eating their hearts out with anxiety had got over their nervousness and hardened into tense fury. When the attack began, commanders and communards had to hold back the Red Army men by their tunics and breeches, shouting to them: "Shoot! Shoot!" Streams of obscenity rolled over the trenches. There were not a few here who had, in wintertime as lads, or grown up men, tightening their belts and pulling on leather gauntlets, taken part in a game of fisticuffs. The ancient, sporting love of a fist fight was in their blood. "Beasts, you beasts!" Fury welled up in them. "Let go, you bastard!" shouted Latugin, the first to rush out of the trench, yelling savagely, his bayonet poised in readiness. The men followed him down the sloping bank in the face of the attackers, shouting hurrah. And the "beasts" gave answering cries of hurrah. The bayonet charge of the Kachalin men was irresistible in its fury. Hurling back those of the enemy who had already reached the shore, they

plunged into the water, beginning fighting right in the middle of the river, laying about them with the butt ends of their rifles, flinging hand grenades, grappling with the enemy in close combat. . . . How could officers, sons of the gentry with pampered bodies, hold out, be they never so spirited, against the burly country lads, Donbas miners, Volga stevedores, lumbermen, who suddenly appeared from under the water and jumped on to their shoulders. Shrieks, the clatter of arms, the thunder of bursting grenades filled the air above the Manich, turbulent and running vermilion with blood. The Whites were beaten off and pressed back, they were beginning to climb out of the water and up the opposite bank. Major General Teplov threw in fresh reinforcements. And then Commissar Ivan Gora took the regimental colours from the hand of the standard-bearer—crimson silk with a gold star, riddled with bullet holes received in other battles—raised it high, and, surrounded by communards, ran heavily up to the bank of the Manich.

Higher up the river, where the water had begun to abate and the tops of the reeds were showing over it, Telegin had posted reserves under the command of Sapozhkov. When Ivan Gora took the colours, Telegin left the command post, flung himself on horseback and galloped up to the flooded meadow. When he got to the reeds he shouted to the Red Army men, who had been wallowing like pigs in the mud half the day:

"The enemy is in flight, Comrades, don't give him time to recover!"

A hundred and fifty fighting men, dragging heavy machine guns in their hands, their boots sucked off in the sticky slime, crawling and swimming, forded the river under cover of the reeds, and struck at the enemy's flank. The issue of the battle was now a certainty. The Whites hurled themselves back from the Manich and began retreating under cross fire from machine guns. Very soon their retreat became mere flight.

A good way from their right flank, spreading over the steppe in thin lava, to cut right across their retreat, a cavalry squadron from an adjacent sector of the front rushed up, hastening to the aid of the Kachalin troops.

The remnants of Teplov's brigade broke through encirclement. Only a few groups were cut off and fell beneath

Red Army bayonets. Further pursuit would have been perilous. Telegin ordered Sapozhkov to reorganize and entrench, himself galloping up to the place, some half mile away, where he could see the regimental colours moving. He had been watching them for a long time, as they were borne across, moved forward, halted, suddenly dipped, raised again, fluttering in the breeze and again moved ahead....

Mist-laden clouds covered the setting sun, and dark fell rapidly over the steppe. Kutepov's guns flashed on the horizon, shells whistled by in their flight to some unknown destination, and at last all was quiet, and night covered the field of the bloody battle.

Telegin went on looking for Commissar Gora as long as it was light. Red Army men whom he met on the way gave conflicting reports. All had seen him cross the Manich with the colours. But after that the flag had been carried by Company Commander Moshkin. But Moshkin himself had been wounded. The colours were last seen in the hands of some sturdy lad. Latugin and Gagin came up to Ivan Ilyich. They were the sole survivors of the artillery crew, and their gun, which had served them so faithfully, was shattered by shellfire.

"How ghastly that was, Ivan Ilyich," said Latugin, unclenching his teeth with an effort. "The very thought of it makes one's blood curdle."

"You daren't go near some of the chaps, even now," said the usually inarticulate Gagin, speaking low. "They're breathing so hard their ribs keep heaving, and they'll stick a bayonet in you if you so much as look at them. . . ."

"Is it Ivan Stepanovich you're looking for, Ivan Ilyich?"

"Yes, yes! Have you seen him?"

"Come with us."

They went to the riverbank, picking their way among dead bodies. Groans and muttered words came here and there out of the darkness. The stretcher-bearers called to one another as they searched for the wounded. Ivan Ilyich could make out the breathless whisper of Kuzma Kuzmich. Latugin, who was in front, suddenly halted and squatted down.

Ivan Gora, long and massive, lay face downwards—a bullet had lodged in his heart and he had fallen on the spot, arms outstretched as if hugging the earth, unwilling, even in death, to let the enemy have it.

Those who had been longest in the regiment, and had known Ivan Gora first as a Red Army man, and then as a company commander, gathered in the field at night, and decided to bury the Commissar in a conspicuous and memorable place, a high mound on the bank of the Manich.

There were plenty of such mounds scattered about but the one selected rose like a column. Perhaps it had been raised in ancient times for the site of a khan's tent, to make an eminence from which the innumerable herds spreading over the steppe could be seen. Perhaps in times still more ancient the Scythians had buried their leader there with his charger and favourite wife, crowning the funeral barrow with willow branches surrounding a gigantic bronze sword, its blade pointing upwards, to be adored as the god of fertility and prosperity.

Commissar Ivan Gora was carried shoulder-high across the river and laid on the spring grass on top of the mound. They combed back his hair and draped his prostrate form with the regimental colours.

It was a still night, everything clearly visible in the light of the moon. Ivan Ilyich stood at the Commissar's feet with his sword unsheathed, and at his head stood Babushkin, Commissar of Company One, a Petrograd communard. The Red Army men filed by in turn, presenting arms as they passed the body.

"Farewell, Comrade!"

When each had taken his leave and it was time to start letting the Commissar into his grave, Latugin ran up on to the top of the mound once more.

"Our mortal foes have killed our best comrade today!" he shouted. "He taught us what this rifle was given to us for... to fight for the truth! That's why it is in my hands... and he was himself a man of truth... one of us to the roots.... He taught us... 'your mother bore you,' he said, 'and you came into the world with a cry—and all you have to do is fight for truth....' I ask the Regimental Commander and Commissar Babushkin to accept me in the Party.... I say this from my very heart, over this body, and this standard...."

They buried the Commissar. Late that night, Dasha called Ivan Ilyich out of the dugout and said, cracking her finger joints:

"Do go to her, take her away."

She led Ivan Ilyich to the mound. The night was getting darker just before the dawn, the moon was sinking, and the steppe breeze whistled past their ears.

"Anisya and I have done all we could, but she won't hear a word...."

Agrippina was sitting next to the freshly dug grave of Ivan Gora, her head bent morosely, her cap and rifle lying beside her. A little way off sat Anisya.

"She's as if turned to stone, the great thing is to get her away," whispered Dasha, and went up to Agrippina. "Look, the Commander of the Regiment has come to ask you to go away."

Agrippina did not raise her head. Words flew by her like the wind flying over the grave. Anisya, still sitting a little way off, lowered her face on to her knees. Ivan Ilyich cleared his throat.

"This won't do, Agrippina," he said. "It'll soon be getting light, we'll all be crossing over to the other side, and you can't stay here alone... that wouldn't be right...."

Without lifting her head, Agrippina muttered dully:

"I didn't leave him then, and I'm not going to now... where should I go?"

Dasha pointed to her own forehead. "Look!" she whispered. "She's wandering."

"Let's have a talk, Agrippina," said Ivan Ilyich, sitting down beside her. "You don't want to leave him, Agrippina... but is this all that is left of Ivan Stepanovich? He will live in our memory, inspire us... Remember that, Agrippina, you are his wife... And his seed is ripening within you..."

Agrippina lifted her hands, clenched them before her face, and let them fall again.

"You are doubly dear to us now.... The regiment will adopt your child... look what a responsibility you have." He stroked her hair. "Pick up your rifle and let's go..."

Agrippina bent her head mournfully towards the place where she had been sitting all night. Then, getting up, she picked up her rifle and her cap and went down the side of the mound.

The bloody battles on the banks of the Manich continued till the middle of May, and then died down. General Denikin, exasperated by the failure of Kutepov's efforts to break through the front of the Tenth Army, and by his appalling list of losses, summoned him to Ekaterinodar. Seated in his own study, with the supercilious disdainful Romanovsky in attendance, Denikin, throwing a thick pencil on the papers in front of him on his desk, with an impatient gesture, said, raising his voice irritably:

"What are we doing, I should like to know—fighting, or getting up a show for Messieurs the allies? We are not gladiators, Your Excellency! What's the point of all this daredevil stuff? Disgraceful! A perfectly uncivilized operation—as if you were guerilla fighters!"

Kutepov, who knew Denikin well, was well aware of the reason for his fury. He said nothing, and let his morose gaze rest on the little bunch of flowers next to the inkstand.

"Read this and rejoice!" Denikin took up the top sheet from the pile of papers. "A wedge has been made in the front of the Ninth Red Army with trifling losses on our side—a brilliant operation.... We have entered the territory of the Cossack rising. We shall probably occupy the village of Veshenskaya in a few days.... But operations in the Donets districts might have developed into a broad offensive if our troops had not been locked up on the Manich. I blush for our strategy, gentlemen.... The eyes of the whole world are upon us... they are extremely impressionable over there, I assure you.... Come here, please...."

He fumbled for his pince-nez among the papers and with Kutepov and Romanovsky strode over to an oak table on which were spread tactical maps.

The plan was for General Pokrovsky and General Ulagai, completing the concentration of large masses of cavalry on the flanks of the Tenth Army, to break through the enemy's rear, demolish the Bolshevik cavalry, seize the village of Velikoknyazheskaya, and accomplish the complete encirclement of the Reds on the Manich in a period of from four to five days.

Denikin extracted from a side pocket a clean linen handkerchief, redolent of eau de cologne, and began wiping his pince-nez, his stumpy fingers with the skin on them dry and shiny, trembling slightly.

"The Volunteer Army is solving problems of world politics. They are beginning to understand that in the West, since the catastrophe of Odessa, Kherson and Nikolayev. . . . We must deal lightning, devastating blows—in this war, applause becomes munition transports. . . . I have always warned against reckless sallies, I don't like gambling. But I don't like losing, either. . . . If our successes in the Donbas do not attain the scope of a general offensive into the interior of the country, and do not end at Moscow, I shall put a bullet through my brains, gentlemen. . . ."

The beauteous Romanovsky tapped the end of a cigarette against his silver case, with a supercilious, omniscient smile. General Kutepov, shooting a glance at him from beneath his low, wrinkled brow, guessed where Denikin's suddenly soaring ideas came from. He must have had a sound dressing-down. But Kutepov was a general of the line, not a staff officer, and questions of high strategy struck him as obscure and exhausting—his business was to tear at the enemy's throat on the spot.

"We will do all that lies in our power, Your Excellency," he said. "If you tell us to take Moscow this autumn, we'll do it. . . ."

The Kachalin men had been making their way to the railway tracks for three days without a sip of water or a crust of bread. The order to retreat had been issued on the 21st of May. The Tenth Army withdrew from the Manich northwards, to Tsaritsyn, breaking through encirclement at the price of stupendous effort and casualties. The dry wind beat the wormwood against the earth, the steppe was grey, and in the murky distance Ulagai's cavalry were gathering like wolf packs.

The baggage horses were constantly dying. The sick and wounded had to be transferred to carts which were already crammed to the utmost. The lightly wounded and the hospital nurses stumbled along behind the carts. Lips swelled and cracked with thirst. Inflamed eyes, narrowed against the east wind, searched the horizon for the contours of a railway water tower. From the broad steppe gullies there came no breath of damp, and only a short time ago they had waded up to their waists in icy water here! Oh, for a few

drops of that water with which to moisten their parched mouths!

In one of these gullies they stumbled upon an ambush: as the carts were winding their way down the grassy slope, shots rang out quite near, and Cossacks (God knows what cover they had found!), confident of getting easy booty, were urging their thin horses to their feet, and hurling themselves upon the baggage train, which was instantly thrown into confusion. Fifty or so daredevil marauders galloped up the slope, their beards thrust forward. But they galloped back as quickly as they came when fire was opened upon them from the carts—each wounded man had a rifle—even Dasha, screwing up her eyes as tight as she could, fired.

The Cossacks turned their horses' heads, a rider and steed rolled together down the slope. Some men ran up to him, hoping to get his water bottle. He turned out to be wearing silver shoulder straps. They dragged him out from beneath the horse, which was killed. "I surrender, I surrender!" he repeated in terror. "I'll give you information, take me to your commander. . . ."

His capturers tore his flask of water from him, and found two more in the saddle bag.

"Bring him here alive!" shouted Company Commander Moshkin, who was seated in a cart with a broken arm and bandaged head.

The captured officer stood at attention before him. A countenance so flabby, loose-lipped, dead-eyed as his, is seldom met with. And he smelt stuffy and sour.

"Who are you—regulars or guerillas?"

"An irregular auxiliary unit, Sir!"

"Getting up risings in our rear, I suppose."

"We are organizing mobilization of the re-enlisted, by order of General Ulagai. . . ."

The baggage train started once more, the officer walking beside the cart, and replying to questions with readiness and precision.

He knew how to purchase his life, being apparently a veteran intelligence-service man. A few Red Army men strode along beside the cart to hear what he had to say. They exchanged glances when, in reply to a question, he told of the retreat of the Ninth Red Army from the Donets district.

and of General Sekretev's forcing a wedge between the Ninth and Eighth armies with his cavalry corps, and of his subsequent sallies in the Red rear.

"You're lying—it wasn't like that," said Company Commander Moshkin uncertainly, without looking at him.

"I'm not—it's all true—allow me, I have a bulletin from the Supreme Command on me. . . ."

Anisya Nazarova slipped off a cart and joined the group of Red Army men around the prisoner. Moshkin read the sheets of the bulletin, which the wind ruffled in his hand. Everybody waited to see what he would say. Anisya kept making feeble efforts to push away her comrades, so as to get nearer to the prisoner. "What's the matter with you—what's so interesting?" they said to her. Her legs felt heavy as lead, her head ached, her eyes seemed to be full of sand. Unable to get near the prisoner, she caught up her comrades, stumbled, seized the reins, and halted the cart. At first nobody could make out what she wanted to do. Craning her neck, she stared at the prisoner from pale eyes which seemed to get bigger and bigger till they spread almost all over her wan darkening face.

"I know that man!" said Anisya. "Comrades, that man burned my children alive . . . almost flogged the life out of my body . . . he flogged twenty-nine people in our village to death. . . ."

The officer leered, shrugging his shoulders. The Red Army men, closing round, glanced from him to Anisya.

"Very good," said Moshkin, "we'll investigate—you go and lie down in the cart, dearie. . . ."

But Anisya, speaking like one in a trance, said:

"Comrades, Comrades—he mustn't be left alive. I'd sooner you tore my heart out . . . search him. His name's Nemshaev, he remembers me. . . ." Suddenly she pointed at the prisoner with a glad cry: "Look! He's recognized me!"

Scores of hands reached out, tearing the tunic, saturated with sweat, off the officer's back, tearing his shirt, turning his pockets inside out, and sure enough they found an identification card made out in the name of Captain Nikolai Nikolayevich Nemshaev. . . .

"I don't know what you're talking about," he muttered sullenly. "The woman's lying, she's raving, she has typhus. . . ."

The Red Army men knew Anisya's story and stepped back silently when, taking a rifle from someone near her, she approached Nemshaev, and tapped him on the shoulder, saying:

"Come on!"

He glared at the grave faces of the Red Army men, drew a deep breath, and made as if to speak to Moshkin, who turned from him and went on reading the sheets of the bulletin. The prisoner clung to the side of the cart, as if salvation lay in this for him. But they tore his hands away, shoving him in the back and saying:

"Go, go. . . ."

He moved into the steppe as if stunned, raising his shoulders to protect his head, stepping like a blind man. Anisya, who was following him ten paces behind, raised the heavy rifle and settled the stock into her shoulder.

"Turn round facing me."

Nemshaev spun round, prepared to leap. Anisya shot him full in the face, and, without so much as looking at him, turned on her heel and went back to her comrades, who had been watching with motionless, stern eyes the carrying out of the just retribution.

"Take your rifle, whoever it belongs to," Anisya said, and went to the last cart in the train, into which she clambered, lying down and covering herself with a horsecloth.

* XVII *

Katya was correcting dictation in exercise books. These books, made from wallpaper cut out and sewn together (they could only be written on on one side), were a great achievement in her impoverished existence. She had gone to Kiev herself for them. It had been quite easy to get an interview with the People's Commissar for Education. Learning who she was, and what she had come about, the Commissar had taken her by the elbow and seated her in an armchair; he had poured her out some carrot tea from a soot-stained kettle standing on the exquisite table, and offered her half an acid-drop. Pacing up and down the carpet, a fur coat flung over his shoulders, and felt boots on his

feet, he had outlined a dizzying program of popular education:

"In ten or fifteen years we shall be a well-educated country. We will make the treasures of world culture the property of the broad masses," he said, fidgeting with his beard with a confident smile. "Vast work on the liquidation of illiteracy confronts us. This disgrace must be wiped out—it is a matter of honour for every intellectual. The whole younger generation must be swept into the educational system from nursery schools and kindergartens to the university. . . . No one and nothing can prevent us Bolsheviks from putting into practice what the best representatives of the intellectuals could only dream of. . . ."

The People's Commissar for Education promised Katya ten thousand exercise books, primers, textbooks, pencils and slates. She went away from him down the marble staircase, as if in a dream. But very soon difficulties and complications set in. The nearer Katya got to the exercise books and primers, the further they moved towards unreality, and the more ambiguous, sarcastic, or gloomy became the people on whom it depended to issue them on her order. In the unheated hotel bedroom, where the bed had no mattress and an electric bulb high up in the ceiling burned so dim that it seemed ready to expire at any moment, Katya, seated in her fur-lined coat on the rickety sofa, gave way to despair.

One day a tall man in a shaggy cap and tightly belted jacket, came into her room without knocking, and went straight to the point, speaking in a deep, bass voice:

"You still here? I know all about your business. Show me all the references you have. . . ."

Standing right beneath the reddish glow from the light-bulb, he looked through the papers. Katya looked trustingly into his strong, handsome, slightly derisive face.

"The swine!" he said. "Saboteurs, rotters. . . . Come to me quite early tomorrow morning at the City Committee . . . we'll do something or other, think out a way. . . . Well, good-bye!"

Through this man Katya received wallpaper and pencils from warehouses, and an entire library (half of which consisted of French books) requisitioned from the esthetically inclined owner of a sugar refinery. Perhaps most tiring of all was the way back with these treasures in a freight truck,

which was assailed at every stop by bearded wild-eyed men carrying sacks, and excited women, their sides sticking out like the ribs of cows with the bundles of foodstuffs concealed under their jackets and skirts.

So after all, Katya did have a little strength in her! She was no longer the helpless kitten, with sinuous body and appealing eyes, purring in strange beds.

Her strength had showed itself the evening of the abortive announcement of herself as Alexei's betrothed. Katya had had a glance at the blessings of a village shopkeeper's life in store for her, and had retreated before them as one who, stumbling upon a yawning grave, stands trembling and transfixed. For her, the grave had been the eyes of Alexei, glaring with vodka and avarice—the eyes of the master, the husband! Everything rebelled in Katya, she was up in arms, and it was this that was so unexpected and so joyous, like feeling one's strength returning after a long illness. Her decision to escape to Moscow when the weather got warmer was equally unexpected. She discovered in herself a discretion which enabled her to keep all this a secret. Alexei and Matryona only noticed that she had cheered up, and had begun to sing at her work.

Alexei was always winking and joking at dinner and supper (he was never seen in the house at any other time): "Look at our little bride..." He too went about in cheerful spirits—he had wrung a decision out of the village meeting and, having broken up the wing of the manor house, was now carting the lumber and bricks to his own land.

Early in January, when Kiev was taken by the Red Army, a military unit had passed through the village of Vladimirskoye, and Alexei had been the first to raise cheers for the Soviets. But soon after affairs took another turn.

A certain "Comrade" Yakov appeared in the village. He requisitioned the good house of the village priest, turning the priest and his wife out to live in the bathhouse. A meeting was called at which the whole case was stated as follows: "Religion is opium for the people. Anyone against the closing of the church is against the Soviet Power." And there and then, without anyone having a chance to speak, a vote was taken and the church sealed. After this, day labourers, and peasants (men and women) not possessing a horse—there were about forty such in the village—were separated

from all the rest, and formed into a Poor Peasants' Committee. Gathering the Committee in the house of the village priest, Yakov spoke with concentrated bitterness:

"The Russian muzhik is an ignorant brute. He has lived a thousand years in dung, and there can be nothing in him but dull rage and avarice. We don't trust the muzhik, and we never will. We will spare him so long as he travels our way, but soon we shall stop sparing him. You are the rural proletariat, you must take a firm hold of power, and you must help us to clip the wings of the muzhik."

Yakov inspired the whole village, the members of the Poor Peasants' Committee included, with alarm. Every word uttered in a village is known to all, and whispers flew from house to house:

"Why does he say that? We're not brute beasts, we're Russians, aren't we living in our own country? And all of a sudden we can't be trusted! And why have everybody's wings got to be clipped? Clip Alexei Krasilnikov's—he's a bandit. . . . Clip Kondratenkov's and Nichiporov's—they're notorious bloodsuckers. . . . Why should I have my wings clipped for my sweaty shirt? No, no, there's something wrong here, some mistake. . . ." Others said: "Good heavens—there's the Soviet Power for you!"

Whenever Yakov, unwashed, long unshaven, in a worn soldier's greatcoat and a cap with a broken visor, but in good boots, and, it was said, well dressed beneath the shabby greatcoat, sallied forth on one of his dubious excursions, he was watched from all windows, the peasants shaking their heads in deep perplexity, and waiting to see what would happen next.

In March, when they were just beginning to cart the dung, and take it into the fields, Yakov called a general meeting and, with more accusations of counterrevolutionary behaviour, demanded the drawing up of a list of all the horses in the village, the requisition of horses in excess, and the immediate organization of communal farming on the ducal estate. . . . The dirty devil, delaying the carting of the dung and the spring ploughing. . . .

A short time after this a food detachment arrived at the village. It was soon generally known that Yakov had presented lists of excess grain which fairly stunned the members of the detachment. Yakov himself went with witnesses from

farm to farm, chalking up on the doors the amount of grain to be taken from each barn.

"Why, I've never had so many poods in my life!" the peasant would exclaim, endeavouring to rub out the sum with his sleeve. "Look in his cellar," Yakov would tell the men from the food detachment. The peasant, afraid to cross himself in front of Yakov, tore open his wadded jacket, exclaiming with tears in his eyes: "There isn't any there, so help me!" Then Yakov would order: "Break up his stove, it's hidden under the stove."

His efforts cleaned out the village, the detachment even bore off the seed wheat. He took Alexei Krasilnikov separately to the committee premises, locked the door, to which was nailed a portrait of the Chairman of the Supreme Military Council of the Republic, placed a revolver beside him on the table, and glanced mockingly at the sullen-faced Alexei.

"Well—let's talk! Got any grain?"

"How could I have grain? I neither ploughed nor sowed in the autumn."

"Where've you driven your horses to?"

"I've given them out in the farmsteads, to friends."

"Where's your money hidden?"

"What money?"

"The money you got by plundering."

Alexei sat there, his head drooping, his only movements the clenching and unclenching of the fingers on his right hand, which made gestures of letting go and gathering up.

"This isn't very nice," he said. "A tax—well, a tax is a tax... but why take a man by the throat and demand his shirt?"

"You'll have to go before the Cheka."

"I'm not refusing, am I? I must, I must, I'll bring you money."

Back in his house, Alexei fairly plunged beneath the floor and began dragging out travelling bags, sacks, and bundles of material. In one bag he kept tsarist and Don currency, and this he distributed about his pockets and in the breast of his shirt. Another, crammed with Kerensky money—worthless rubbish—he handed to Matryona.

"Take it to the committee, tell them we haven't any other. If they don't believe you, and come here to pull up the floor,

don't make any resistance. Throw the watches and chains into the well. Put the lengths of stuff into the cart, smother it with hay, and get a horse from Gaffer Afanasy in the night, and take the stuff to Dementyev's farm, I shall be waiting for you there."

"Where will you go, Alexei?"

"I don't know. I won't be back soon, and when I do come, you'll find me quite a different fellow."

Matryona drew her shawl low over her brows, concealing with its ends the bag full of Kerensky money, and went to the committee. Alexei shut the door on the latch and turned to Katya, who was standing by the stove. His eyes were filled with malicious gaiety, his nostrils dilated.

"Put on something warm, Ekaterina Dmitrevna... a fur coat and woollen stockings. And put on warm underclothes, too.... And hurry up, we haven't a moment to lose...."

As he looked at Katya his eyes widened, and sparks seemed to come from the pupils, while his stiff blonde moustache quivered above his parted teeth.

"I'm not going anywhere with you," was Katya's reply.

"Is that your answer? Have you nothing else to say to me?"

"I'm not going."

Alexei moved closer to her, his dilated nostrils turning pale.

"I shan't leave you here alone, so don't hope for that.... I haven't fed you daintily, you bitch, for another man to cover you.... Barley-sugar Miss.... I never so much as touched you yet, but when I do start twisting your wrists and ankles, you little beastie, then you'll moan...."

He seized Katya in his iron grip, breathing stertorously, she driving her elbow into his Adam's apple, and carried her up to the bed in two strides. Katya gathered up strength that she had not known she possessed, wriggling like an eel: "I won't, I won't, brute, brute...." She leaped to her feet, but he fell on her again. Alexei was hot in his wadded jacket, which was lined with money and impeded his movements. He began striking blindly at Katya. Sheltering her head, she repeated over and over again, with savage hate, through clenched teeth: "Kill me, you brute—kill me!"

The latch danced on the door, and Matryona shouted from the entry: "Open the door, Alexei!" He stepped back from the bed clutching at his face. Matryona knocked still more

loudly, and he opened the door. Matryona came in, exclaiming:

"Get away as fast as you can, you fool! They're coming here!"

Alexei glared at her for a moment, then, as he grasped the meaning of her words, intelligence returned to his face. Gathering up sacks and bundles of stuff he went out of the house. Seated on the only horse remaining on the farm, he went out by the backyard, jumping the stile in the wattle fence, trotting downhill towards the river, and, once on the other side, setting his horse to the gallop and disappearing beyond the wood.

A little later Matryona got a skirt and bodice out of a trunk, and threw them on to the bed, where Katya lay, her clothes in shreds.

"Put them on," she said. "Go away somewhere, do—you're a disgraceful sight."

Yakov and his witnesses searched Alexei's house from attic to cellar, but they did not find the things hidden in the cart. Matryona went for a horse that night, and drove off to the farmstead. Katya sat in her thick coat all night, in the dark, cold hut, waiting for the dawn to come. She had to think over everything in perfect quiet. As soon as day dawned she would go away. But where? Planting her elbows on the table she squeezed her head in her hands and began sobbing. Then she went to the pail of water standing at the door, and took a drink from the scoop. To Moscow, of course. . . . But who was left there of her old friends? All was scattered and lost. . . . She fell asleep sitting at the table, and when, shuddering violently, she awoke, it was already daylight. Matryona had not come back yet. Adjusting the shawl over her head, Katya glanced with disgust into the mirror on the wall. Then she went to the committee.

She waited long at the back entrance before they waked up in the priest's house. At last Yakov came out with the slop pail, shot out its contents on a heap of dirty snow, and said to Katya:

"I was just going to send for you. . . . Come with me. . . ."

He led Katya into the house, offered Katya a seat, and fumbled for some time in the drawer of his desk.

"We're going to shoot your husband, or whatever you consider him."

"He's not my husband, he's nothing to me," replied Katya quickly. "All I ask is to have a chance to go away from here. I want to go to Moscow."

"I want to go to Moscow," echoed Yakov mockingly. "And I want to save you from being shot."

Katya sat in his room till nightfall, telling him all about herself and her relations with Alexei. Every now and then Yakov went out for a long time, coming back to throw himself down and light a cigarette.

"According to instructions from the People's Commissariat for Education," he said, "a school must be opened in the village. You're not so very suitable, but we'll try you—for want of a better. . . . Your other duty will be to inform me of everything that goes on in the village. We'll settle the details of this correspondence later. I warn you: if you begin chattering about this you will be severely punished. I advise you to forget about Moscow for the present."

And so, quite unexpectedly, Katya became a teacher. A small empty hut next to the school was set aside for her. The old teacher had died in November of pneumonia; the Petlurites, at one time quartering a military unit in the school, had torn up all the primers and exercise books for cigarettes, even the wall map. Katya did not know where to begin, and went to Yakov for advice. But he was no longer in the village. Receiving a special-delivery telegram, he had departed as abruptly as he had arrived, having time to tell no one but old Afanasy, who now haunted the Poor Peasants' Committee, fearing to lose his influence.

"Tell your comrades there must be no pandering to the muzhiks, none at all! I'll be back again, and I'll investigate. . . ."

After Yakov's departure it was quiet in the village. The peasants, coming up to sit on the steps of the priest's house, said to the members of the committee:

"You've started a fine business, Comrades—how are you going to answer for it? Tchik, tchik. . . ."

The members of the committee themselves realized that they were in a hole, and that the quiet in the village was merely on the surface. Yakov did not return. Of Alexei Krasilnikov it was rumoured that he had gathered a detachment in the surrounding district and gone over to Ataman Grigoryev. And very soon the whole village was talking about

this Grigoryev, who was said to have drawn up an order and embarked upon a campaign to destroy the Soviet towns. Once again people began to expect changes.

Katya received promises of help from the village Soviet—promises to repair stoves and put in window glass. She washed the floors and windows herself, and set out the crippled desks. She was a conscientious woman and alone in her tiny hut of an evening would cry quietly, ashamed to think of the deceit about to be practised on the children. For what was she to teach them, without primers or exercise books? What truths was she to teach them, when she considered she was all made up of untruths herself? And when the merry voices of boys and girls were heard one day around the school in the early morning, Katya had to gather up all her self-mastery. She smoothed down her hair and drew it into a tight knot, and scoured her hands till they were rigorously clean. Then she opened the school door, smiled, and said to the little boys and girls cocking their little snub noses at her:

"Good morning, children!"

"Good morning, Ekaterina Dmitrevna," they shouted, in such pure, ringing, gay voices that her heart suddenly felt young. She made them sit at the desks, herself mounted to the teacher's desk, raised her forefinger, and said:

"While we have no books or exercise books, and nothing to write with, children, I will tell you things, and if there's anything you don't understand, you must ask me.... We'll begin with Rurik, Sineus and Truvor today...."

Katya's housekeeping was extremely modest. She did not want to take anything from Alexei's house, and moreover shrank from facing the sombre Matryona with her lowering countenance. In Katya's hut there was a twig broom at the door, two clay pots on the shelf, and an old wooden tub of water in the porch. Her only comfort was the tiny orchard—two cherry trees, an apple tree and some gooseberry bushes, surrounded by a wattle fence. Beyond the fence began the fields.

When the cherry trees began to blossom, Katya felt as if she were seventeen again.

She usually prepared for her lessons and read the French novels from the sugar refiner's library in her orchard, where she often summoned up memories of Paris in the blue haze

of bygone years. Long ago—in 1914—she had lived in a Parisian suburb in a top-storey flat with a balcony suspended above the quiet narrow street, overlooking the roof of the little house in which Balzac had once lived.... The windows of his study looked not into the street, but on to the orchards descending in terraces to the Seine. In his day this must have been almost the country. When his creditors had appeared in the street, he had quietly escaped from them by way of the orchards, to the bank of the Seine. Now these orchards belonged to some rich American lady, and when Katya went on to her balcony of an evening she could hear the harsh springtime cries of peacocks coming from there. She had just come to Paris after separating with her husband, and in her grief and loneliness it had seemed to her that life was over for her.

The children grew fond of Katya, and listened to her stories from Russian history very attentively—they were like fairy tales. Sums, multiplication tables and dictation, were all of course harder both for the children and Katya herself, but they overcame these difficulties by their combined efforts. She was much more popular in the village now, everyone having heard how Alexei had almost murdered her. The women brought her gifts—one would bring milk, another eggs, a third bread. And these gifts formed her meals.

Katya was sitting beneath an old, moss-covered apple tree, correcting exercise books. A little boy had been snivelling for a long time beside the low wattle fence, as ancient and rickety as the apple tree.

"I won't do it any more, Auntie Katya."

"I'm very angry with you, Ivan Gavrikov, and I'm not going to speak to you two whole days."

Despite his innocent blue eyes, Ivan Gavrikov was a regular scamp. He pulled little girls' pigtails during lessons, and when reproved for this, seemed to have fallen asleep and flopped down under the desk—there was no end to his pranks.

"No, Gavrikov, I see very well that you're not really sorry, and have only come here because you have nothing else to do...."

"I won't do it again, honest I won't, honest...."

Somebody entered the hut from the street, and Matryona's voice was heard calling Katya.

What did she want? Katya quickly bestowed her forgive-

ness on Gavrikov and went into the hut. Matryona greeted her with a steady, hostile stare.

"Have you heard? Alexei is somewhere near... Katerina, I don't want all that over again—you don't belong to us... He'll kill you anyhow. He's like an animal... the blood he's spilled.... It's all your fault.... Somebody just told me—Alexei is bringing machine-gun carriages. Leave this place, Katerina. I'll give you a horse and cart, and I'll give you money...."

Vadim Petrovich had plenty of leisure for reflection during the time he lay in hospital at Kharkov. He found himself on the other side of the fiery barrier. This new world was outwardly unattractive: the unheated ward, the wet snow falling past the windowpanes, the wretched food—a thin grey soup flavoured with dried fish, the prosy talk of the patients—about food, home-grown tobacco, their temperatures, the head doctor. Never a word was uttered of the unknown future for which Russia was heading, of the events shaking the country, of the endless bloody strife; the former participants in all this—these same sick and wounded men in dingy flannel dressing gowns, their heads shaven—either slept for days on end, or played draughts on their beds, with home-made men; every now and then somebody would hum a dreary refrain.

Vadim Petrovich was not ostracized, but neither was he made to feel at home. He was in a state for self-communion. So much that was not yet thought out or resolved had accumulated in his mind—so many memories had been broken off, as in a book from which a page has been torn at the most exciting place. Vadim Petrovich had accepted this new world unhesitatingly, for all that was happening affected his own country. Now the time had come to understand and analyze it all.

One day the head doctor brought him some Moscow newspapers. Vadim Petrovich read them with new eyes, no longer making malicious fun of them beforehand, as he used to.... The Russian revolution was spreading to Hungary, Germany and Italy. The newspaper columns were tinged with recklessness, confidence, and optimism. The Russia that had been crushed by war, torn by internecine dissen-

sions, divided up in advance among the great powers, was taking the leadership of world politics, becoming a power to reckon with.

Vadim Petrovich began to understand the prosaic calm of his companions in the grey dressing gowns—it meant they knew what had been accomplished and they had done their bit for it. . . . Their calm—eternal, heavy-handed, heavy-footed, contemplative—had endured five centuries and God knows enough had happened during this time. . . . Strange and peculiar has been the history of the Russian people, the Russian State. Vast, formless ideas—ideas of greatness on a world scale, of the just life, have haunted it through the centuries. Bold theories, never before advanced, were being put into practice, much to the perturbation of the rest of Europe, which gazed with fear and indignation at this eastern monster, at once weak and powerful, poverty-stricken and immeasurably wealthy, producing from its sombre depths a veritable galaxy of ideas and theories universal in scope. . . .

In the end it was Russia which had chosen a new path, hitherto untried by any country, and the very first steps along this path had echoed through the world. . . .

With such thoughts going through his head Vadim Petrovich was not likely to worry about the dirty rivulets chasing the snows of March along the street outside his window, or the sullen, discontented Soviet employee trudging by in rotting boots, a shopping bag and a can for kerosene at his back, on his way to sit on one of the innumerable boards now functioning. He did not care what the soup he gulped down was like, and where the fish's eyes in it came from. He was impatient to begin to take his part in all this as soon as possible.

The Ukraine was being cleared of Petlurites. Ekaterinoslav had recently been captured by the Red Army. Petlura had clung stubbornly to Belaya Tserkov, but at last he was dislodged here, too, and crossed the frontier into Galicia with the fragments of his units. A great wave of guerilla risings preceded the advance of the Red Army troops. The scope of these risings was such that it was difficult either to calculate their dimensions, or control them. They burst out like fires in villages and throughout whole districts torn by the acute struggle between the land-hungry peasantry and the powerful kulak elements, both of which organized in

detachments, cavalry and infantry, clashing in bloody encounters. Secret agents—Petlura's, Denikin's, Polish and some from organizations still more dubious and mysterious—swarmed everywhere, disguised and treacherous. The Soviet Power was established in the towns and along the main railway lines, and war raged on either side of the railway, as far as a shell from an armoured train could travel.

At last Vadim Petrovich received his long-awaited appointment—to the staff of a brigade of military students, where Chugai was the commissar. He got his discharge in the middle of March, and was still limping about with the aid of a stick when he left for Kiev to join his unit.

The Zeleni band, splitting off from Ataman Grigoryev's followers, galloped right up to Kiev on hundreds of machine-gun carriages, breaking up village Soviets and hunting Communists on the way. Zeleni left behind him in his path the corpses of men and women flayed alive, or forced on to sharpened tree stumps. Members of Poor Peasants' Committees he had burned to death in the barns, Jews were nailed to doors, their bellies ripped open, and a cat sewn into them. The plan for liquidating this band was worked out with the participation of Roshchin in the headquarters of the People's Commissar for War. The forces at their disposal were few. The Ukrainian People's Commissar for War came by steamer from Kiev to control operations on the spot.

The Dnieper was still very full. The steamer's paddles splashed through clear water and lazy whirlpools. Neither the noise of the paddles nor the voices of the military students could drown the sound of the nightingales singing on the banks, now downy with fragrant and sticky foliage, variegated by "cats'-tails," white fluff, and the yellow speckles on the buds of the pussy willow. The sun, rising over the floods, scorched the deck. Vadim Petrovich stood at the rail, gazing at the gleaming surface of the water.

He had seen many a spring, but the wine of life had never before surged through his veins so turbulently.... And this at the most unsuitable, uncalled-for moment.... His mind was foggy with vague forebodings... no good fumbling in your pocket for a cigarette, no good knitting your brows like a sober businesslike character—you will not

be able to shake off the spell which has descended upon you . . . there it is, the mist of spring, rising from over water, islets, half-submerged huts, and penetrated with light from the huge sun suspended within it. Its light rests gently on the water, the pale, shimmering reflections of the trees, the backs of cows, knee-deep in the river, the grassy mound on to which a bull has climbed in order to gaze his fill at the new, amazing miracle of spring. What was really strange was that all this time, ever since Ekaterinoslav, Roshchin had thought very little about Katya. She seemed to have retired with his past, to be too closely bound up with the life of which he had become so vehemently critical. . . . When his thoughts returned to Katya he himself returned to the Roshchin he had once seen in the hairdresser's mirror. He had not then been sufficiently repelled to shoot, or at least spit, at his own reflection—now he would not have hesitated.

Two springs ago his feelings for Katya had seemed to fill the universe—the whole of that universe which lay behind the wrinkled forehead of a human being profoundly shaken, mortally wounded. He had then needed Katya's love, especially in that lonely hour in the Ekaterinoslav hotel, when he had looked at the door handle, and wondered if a man could hang himself on it. . . . And now—did he not need it any more? Was that it? Had he betrayed Katya in Rostov the first time, and in Ekaterinoslav the second time?

His gaze rested on the banks as they floated by, and he inhaled the moist, honey-laden air into his lungs, and felt neither remorse nor repentance. No, there had been no betrayal in Ekaterinoslav. . . . There he had made his reckonings with the past. And there had been Marusya . . . with her brief, innocent, passionate song of the new life—of these spring torrents, of immeasurable, untasted joy. The bull roared from the grassy mound, and in the stern of the steamer the students laughed, one of them bellowing in imitation of the bull. Roshchin closed his eyes blissfully. Death is not despair, after all. Marusya's death had been a bright one. It had been the cry of the departing to those remaining: love life, lay hold of it with all your might, make of it your happiness. . . .

He had not relinquished his efforts to find Katya. At his request enquiries for Alexei Krasilnikov were sent out from the People's Commissariat for War to executive committees

in the districts of Ekaterinoslav and Kharkov, but so far no information as to his whereabouts had been received. There was nothing more that Vadim Petrovich could do at the moment—these few hours on the deck of the steamer were the only free moments he had had after six weeks of working eighteen hours a day.

Chugai and the People's Commissar for War approached him. The Commissar was a lean man in a belted canvas jacket, his face reddened by the sun and his bleary eyes looking like those of a drunkard, although he never touched spirits, and so detested drunkards that he almost shot his brigade commander, a very decent fellow, when he caught him in his hut with a bottle of vodka on the table before him. Pointing to the steep shore, above which a belfry tower loomed white, the Commissar said:

"That's my village. . . . When my grandmother heard the steamer hoot—she was a very fussy old lady—she used to fill a sieve with plums, pears and nuts and send me to the landing place to sell them. . . . Well—nobody could make a trader of me. . . ."

"My grandmother was a good old soul," drawled Chugai. "Always going to holy places, she used to take me with her till I turned ten . . . begging. . . ."

The Commissar went on without listening to what Chugai said:

"Then they apprenticed me to a blacksmith. The smithy's probably there still, over there, just below the belfry. To this day I like the smell of charcoal and coal gas. When I got tired of cuffs on the neck I applied to go to Kiev, to the engine sheds, that's how it was . . . then I went to Kharkov to the engineering works. . . ."

And Chugai, not listening to what the Commissar said, went on talking:

"I was a great hand at chanting in the church porch. I used to scratch myself somewhere, smear the blood over my forehead, and lift up my eyes, and sing psalms. . . . And how I used to fight my Granny for kopecks. . . ."

He broke off and repeated abstractedly:

"So Gran and I used to fight. . . ."

Gazing at the shore, now jutting out in a cape, round which the Dnieper wound its way towards the flooded meadows, his prominent eyes suddenly focussed tensely, and he

slammed his ribboned cap on to his head, and went quickly to the captain's bridge. . . .

"Hi, Dad!" he shouted to the captain, a wizened old fellow with a drooping moustache, "steer to larboard of the flooded banks."

"Can't be done, Comrade! We've got to keep to the fairway—there are shoals there. . . ."

"Don't keep to the fairway!" Chugai smote his holster. "Make a sharp turn!"

The steamer rounded the headland and a big village with a high belfry tower, windmills, whitewashed huts and low-growing flourishing orchards putting out tender green foliage gradually came into sight on the sloping bank.

"See over there, standing a little apart—you can just see it—that's the hut I was born in," said the Commissar to Roshchin.

Chugai shouted earnestly: "Here you! Port helm, and look sharp!"

There were numbers of carts on the bank, and innumerable boats at its foot; people were pressing towards the boats and jumping into them, and in one boat men were rowing hastily. Chugai, his cloak fluttering, ran down the ladder to the deck. And almost simultaneously shots from the shore and boats rained down upon the steamer, and machine-gun fire from the steamer thundered back. The men on one of the boats dived into the water. The crowd on the bank fell into confusion, hurling themselves upon the carts and galloping up the steep, broad street, raising clouds of dust. The church bell boomed out the alarm.

The shooting and flight only lasted a few minutes. The bank was deserted. Chugai, his prominent eyes gleaming ecstatically, went back up the ladder.

"It's Zeleni! He got here after all, the son-of-a-bitch! There's a plan of encirclement for you, Vadim Petrovich! Well, Commissar, I suppose we'd better make a landing!"

Zeleni's band, surrounded, hurled themselves hither and thither like a pack of wolves, and were at last pressed up to the railway track beneath fire from an armoured train and demolished in a dense nut grove, into which the carts of the bandits had rushed headlong, hoping to make a geta-

way. The whole bush-grown field had been dug into pits beforehand, and teams of four foam-covered horses, terrified by the bullets and hand grenades, had come rearing out of the grove, the ones behind making a dash for the carts, breaking them up and overturning them. The bandits hurled themselves among the bushes, where death awaited them, and not one of them put up the slightest prayer for mercy. Ataman Zeleni was found beneath a heap of last year's dry twigs. When they pulled him out by the legs, the military students were amazed. They had expected to see an awe-inspiring giant, but he turned out to be weedy and pock-marked—there was nothing of him. Only his small, shifty eyes, colourless, vindictive, betrayed the vulpine breed. They tied his hands and feet so as to take him alive to Kiev.

But a detachment from his band managed to break through at one place and march eastward. The War Commissar sent a cavalry regiment, three hundred strong, after it, headed by Chugai and Roshchin. A long and cautious pursuit began. The bandits changed horses at the farmsteads, the Reds followed in their tracks, with no changes of mounts. It appeared the bandits were heading for the village of Vladimirskoye. This information was gleaned from the peasants in a village where, only a day before, they had requisitioned horses and made off with all that could be stolen in a hurry.

"Do finish them off, Comrades, we must tell you we're sick of these here hostilities," said the peasants to Chugai and Roshchin, at the well where the horsemen were watering their steeds. "We know that ataman of theirs well—he's from the village of Vladimirskoye, Alexei Krasilnikov—used to be a decent chap, there's no denying it, but got spoilt, and now he's a mad devil. . . ."

Thus it was that Vadim Petrovich stumbled upon the track of Alexei, whom he had unwittingly been pursuing for nearly two weeks—upon the track of Katya. He had plenty to agitate him: he was now only separated from Katya by a single day's march. In what state would he find her? Tortured, unrecognizable, so that all he could do would be to press her grey head to his bosom? Grey . . . grey. . . . "Now you can rest, Katya, we will live, we must live. . . ." No, no, it was unthinkable—she could never have become the docile wife of Krasilnikov—that was unthinkable! The most likely of all was that

he would be reining in his horse at the end of the day's march, beside Katya's grave.... Perhaps, after all, that would be best of all for her.... Katya's image would remain intact, unsullied.... The regiment rode swiftly over the dusty highway. Vadim Petrovich swayed in the saddle. The image of Katya grew blurred and confused in his austere memories. He would take her as he found her, whatever her state.

The burned huts were still smoking in the village of Vladimirskoye, the children were still coming to peep horror-struck at the pools of blood not yet soaked up by the ashes, women, trembling and swollen-eyed with weeping, were still hiding in the neighbours' yards, when Chugai and Roshchin broke into the village from both ends, in two deployments. But Krasilnikov was no longer there. Somebody had warned him, and only about half an hour before the arrival of the Reds he and his bandits made off, after dealing with the members of the Poor Peasants' Committee, slashing seventeen men to death with their swords, and then doing the same by an eighteenth-old Afanasy—just for the hell of it. The peasants were so furious with him that almost the entire village ran out to meet and surround the cavalrymen, whose horses were swaying beneath them.

"Go after him!" they cried. "Kill Alexei, his forces are weak, he has no ammunition. He hasn't gone far, we know where they went, the swine.... You can take them with your bare hands...."

"And can you give us fresh mounts, Comrade Citizens?" asked Chugai.

"We'll give you horses. We'll find horses for that."

"How many?"

"We can muster fifty or so.... Leave yours with us, then we'll change back. He's worrying us to death, honest, he is."

While they were going for horses and saddling the fresh ones, Vadim Petrovich sauntered up to the women. Seeing that this man wanted to ask them something, they moved closer.

"I used to know Krasilnikov in the war with Germany," he said. "His brother was married, but I don't think he was. Is he now?"

The women, not yet realizing what he was driving at, answered eagerly:

"He is, he is!"

"He's not married! She's not his wife. . . ."

"Well, she just lived with him. . . ."

"No, she didn't then. . . I'll tell you, Comrade soldier. . . He won this woman playing cards with Makhno and brought her here, wanted to marry her. . . Of course she told him: 'Marry me, if you like, but I'm not used to living like a peasant. . . ' she's from the gentry, you know, and she's young and pretty. . . And the Germans burned Alexei's farm last spring. . . so he wanted to build a new one. . . and then came all that business with Yakov. . . ."

A third woman, still better informed, pushed her way up to Vadim Petrovich.

"Listen, Comrade Commander, he beat her, he beat her terribly, but the accursed devil didn't manage to kill her. . . She's been teaching in the school here since March. . . ."

"I see, I see," said Vadim Petrovich, coughing. "And is she here now, in the village?"

The women began exchanging glances. Then a fourth, who had only just come up, said:

"He took her away under some hay in a cart, alive or dead, we don't know. . . ."

A little boy who had been gazing with fascinated eyes at Roshchin—at his brass-handled sword, his dusty spurred boots, his big wrist watch, his dangling revolver—threw back his head to see his face, and said gruffly:

"They're telling lies, Uncle! They don't know anything about Auntie Katya. But *I* do!"

A plain, thin little girl with a sore on her lip cried out from behind the boy:

"You can believe what he says, Uncle—this little boy knows everything."

"Well—what do you know?"

"Matryona took Auntie Katya to the station. Auntie Katya didn't want to go away, she cried like anything, and Matryona cried too. . . Then Auntie Katya said to me: 'Tell the children I'm coming back. . . ' Alexei rode into the village with his carts, and Matryona and Auntie Katya went away the other end. But when they got to the top of the hill they made me get out."

"To horse!" cried Chugai.

Vadim Petrovich had no time to hear the end of the boy's story. The detachment was riding out of the village with machine-gun carts and fresh horses. A short, swarthy peasant—one of those who had had to sit the whole day up to their navels in water in the well, was galloping beside Chugai and Roshchin. He had got on to an unsaddled horse, just as he was, barefoot, his clothes stiff with water, his shirt in tatters, his beard dishevelled. He led the detachment around the outskirts to the oak forest which was the only place the bandits could have gone to in these parts.

They got there while it was still light and surrounded the forest, leaving an outlet for the bandits to escape by and fall into ambush. The rays of the low sun found their way from beneath the shiny foliage between the rugged tree trunks. Vadim Petrovich's horse was restless, tossing its head, stopping abruptly, biting at its knee, and kicking its belly with one of its hind legs. At last Vadim Petrovich let go of the bridle, holding his carbine in readiness in both hands. The rays of the sun, with the gilded clouds of gnats dancing in them, slanted in stripes and speckles through the wood, and it was hard to see anything in front or to the side, where the men were creeping up on the right and left in a thin line, crunching the fallen twigs as they made their way cautiously through the undergrowth and tall ferns.

Their guide told them they must be getting near a woodman's lodge, and would soon come to the only path along which the bandits could have made their way into the heart of the forest. And suddenly a moss-grown roof with a saddle-like ridge came into vision a few steps ahead of him. Vadim Petrovich halted, peering from beneath the dense overhanging growth. He whistled softly. The twigs crackled louder and nearer beneath the feet of the men. Urging on his horse again, he rode through the bushes, and saw before him the abandoned lodge, in front of which, in a small glade, were several unharnessed carts, and a litter of rubbish and rags. The bandits had left this spot.

Vadim Petrovich, holding his carbine in readiness, began cautiously going round the hut. Alexei Krasilnikov, with equal cautiousness, backed before him from one corner to the other, his intention being to get the horse of this rider. Roshchin, looking back, halted near one of the side walls,

Alexei took up his position by the front wall, with the broken windowpanes and the door torn off its hinges. In order to do the job with the least possible noise, he decided to use only his knife, which he held in readiness. When Roshchin turned the corner of the hut, Alexei rushed at him with his knife, but Roshchin managed to protect himself with his carbine and Alexei, leaping backwards, struck his back violently against the wall of the hut. His knife fell, and he gazed at Vadim Petrovich as at one returned from the dead. Squealing in superstitious horror, he crouched low and took to his heels, waving his arms with confused movements.

"Alexei!" cried Roshchin, tugging at the bridle and galloping after him. Alexei ran up to an oak and suddenly flung his arms round it, pressing his face against the trunk. Roshchin leaped from his saddle at the gallop and aimed point-blank at Alexei's broad, quivering back.

"Is this where she lived?" asked Roshchin.

"M'h'm," replied Ivan Gavrikov.

Roshchin, stooping, strode across the threshold into the crooked hut, with its solitary tiny window, so low that it was completely concealed by the dock leaves outside it. In the green light beside the window stood a table which was also small and low; on it were exercise books made from wall-paper and a few primers. One of the exercise books lay open, an ink bottle and a pen beside it. Evidently Katya had been only just in time to flee. He squatted down beside the table. The little boy, furtively covering his mouth with his hand, and almost choking with laughter, motioned to Roshchin with his eyes to look at the stove.

Just in front of an orifice in the stove, on a ledge, sat a fledgling rook, with round, foolish eyes—it must have fallen out of a nest in the stove pipe. Noticing that it was being watched, it jumped sideways into the stove, helping itself by flapping its wings.

"There's four of them in there," said the boy, "and I'll get them all."

Shuffling the exercise books on the table, Vadim Petrovich came upon Katya's school diary, in which she had entered the lessons, and certain events. Almost every day's entries ended with the words: "Ivan Gavrikov misbehaved

again . . ." or: "I swear I won't speak to Ivan Gavrikov for three whole days . . ." or: "Ivan Gavrikov again walked along the ridge of the roof to frighten the girls. I'm at my wits' end. . . ."

"Who's this Ivan Gavrikov?"

"That's me."

"Why did you misbehave and give Ekaterina Dmitrevna so much trouble?"

Ivan Gavrikov heaved a heavy sigh, and his blue eyes looked utterly innocent.

"I can't help it . . . I do my lessons well, though. Look at the girls' copybooks. Just a row of sticks! And this is mine. You'd be surprised. I know the multiplication table all through. You can ask me." He screwed up his eyes tight.

"I believe you."

Vadim Petrovich sat down on the floor, his legs tucked beneath him, and went on turning the pages of the diary. There was not a single word about the writer, but Katya's eternal youth, trustfulness and pure tenderness seemed to rise from every page, and he seemed to see her hand, with the blue veins, and her clear, luminous eyes. . . .

"Nine nines is eighty-one—that's right, isn't it?" said Ivan Gavrikov.

"Well done! Look here, didn't she tell you where she was going?"

"She said she was going to Kiev."

"Are you telling the truth?"

"Why should I tell a lie?"

"Perhaps she had some more letters and exercise books put away somewhere. Don't you know?"

"Everything's here. I'll take these home with me, she said we must take great care of our exercise books, or the muzhiks would use them for smokes."

On the last page of the diary Roshchin read:

"Somehow I believe you're alive and we shall meet again one day. . . . You know I feel as if I had emerged from a long, long night. . . . I want to tell you about the tiny world I live in. In the morning I'm awakened by the birds singing at the window. I go to the river for a bathe. Then, on the way, I drink milk at old Agafya's—I owe her a ruble sixty kopecks now, but she will wait. Then the children come and we have lessons. There's nothing to interfere with us, we

have no cares. It seems human beings don't in the least need what we used to think necessary, and what we couldn't live without. . . . I feel quite ashamed to admit it—I feel as if I were seventeen again. I know you'll understand what I'm trying to say, Dashenka. . . . My only trouble sometimes comes from the behaviour of my favourite little boy, Ivan Gavrikov. . . . He's remarkably. . . ."

Here the letter broke off, there being no more room in the exercise book. Vadim Petrovich pulled Ivan Gavrikov towards him, and placed him between his knees.

"Well, what shall I give you?"

"A cartridge."

"I haven't got a used one. . . ."

"Come out into the yard, and shoot. . . ."

Vadim Petrovich got up from the floor, doubled up the exercise book, and thrust it into the front of his tunic.

"I'm going to take this exercise book, Ivan."

"You mustn't—she'll be cross."

"I shall soon see Auntie Katya and I'll tell her I took it. Let's go out and shoot. . . ."

* XVIII *

The deserted streets of Tsaritsyn, in which heaps of rubbish lay in front of the wide-open doors of the porches, were sweltering in the windless heat of the sun. The inhabitants were in hiding. The only signs of life were the thundering of the carts bearing public property and departmental archives down the steep descents to the Volga. The town was at its last gasp. The Tenth Army, its ranks greatly depleted since the fighting on the Manich, was with difficulty sustaining, on its approach to the town, the attacks of General Wrangel's newly-formed North Caucasian Army.

The telephone exchange was still working, but there was no longer either water or electricity in the town. The factories were at a standstill. All that could be taken away from them had been unscrewed, removed, dismantled and carried to the landing stage. No one was left in the working-class quarters but children and old folk. The Tsaritsyn proletariat, which had made enormous sacrifices during the last ten months for the defence of the town, expected no quarter

from the Whites, and those who were still able were fighting in the Red Army, others leaving on the roofs of railway carriages, and on the decks and in the holds of steamers. People fled to the north simply to get away. The timber wharves on the banks of the Volga were burning. The booming of heavy guns came nearer and nearer.

The whole life of the town revolved around the railway stations and docks. The bank of the Volga was cluttered with sacks, crates, machine parts and lathes, and hundreds of men soaked in their sweat, as they handled all this stuff, with shouts and oaths, and dragged it down gangways on to steamers. Thousands of men and women, waiting to embark, stood in dense queues or, silent and famished, lay about the shore, staring through the motionless screen of dust at the oily surface of the water, as it lay gleaming in the sun. Towards the end of June the broad stream of the Volga had become so shallow that a sandy reef near the opposite bank seemed nearer than it had ever been before, and people walked about on it naked, and bathed from its edges. Bathing was going on on the near side, too, amidst the floating rubbish on the surface of the tepid water around the wharves. But even from the river there came no coolness.

One after another the dirty, bedraggled steamers came to anchor at the docks. Delirious cries rose from them, and their decks were crowded with refugees and Red Army men, amidst corpses and typhus fever patients, groaning, muttering and tossing in delirium. Scores of steamers and tugs, waiting for loading and unloading, rubbed sides, hooting hoarsely. They all came from downstream, from Astrakhan and Chorny Yar.

Sanitary workers, spattered with lime dust, ran on to the decks, striding across the sick and flinging the dead on to the riverbank, to make room for the living. Lime was scattered and carbolic acid sprinkled. Orders had been received to stack the dead on shore in lemonade and *kvass* stands. The corpses were beginning to swell from the heat, and the jerry-built booths fell apart. It was the heavy stench as much as anything else which made people in such a hurry to leave the shore of Tsaritsyn behind. Over the town, like shadows dimly discerned through a veil of dust, soared Wrangel's airplanes, dropping bombs into the river.

Their sacks catching on the bayonets of Red Army soldiers, men and women pushed through the barriers at the landing stages, hurling themselves on to the steamers. Crates and sacks crashed on to the decks, and the steamers settled so low in the river that the water reached the gunwales.

Amidst this throng, on the shore right in front of the gangway, stood a cart in which lay Anisya and Dasha. Kuzma Kuzmich had brought them from the front in obedience to the rigorous orders of the Regimental Commander not to evacuate the women by rail, but to get them on to a steamer, even if he should die in the attempt.

"You have never fulfilled a more responsible mission, Comrade Nefedov," Telegin had said. "You will put them on board and look after them as best you can, by fair means or foul. You will be responsible for their lives."

They lay on the cart in hay, partially covered with rags, like a couple of almost fleshless skeletons. Anisya had regained consciousness, but was still too weak even to open her mouth, and Kuzma Kuzmich had to part her teeth with his fingers to give her a drink of warm water. Dasha, who had contracted typhus fever after Anisya, was delirious, muttering incessantly in low, angry tones.

Kuzma Kuzmich had already let a number of steamers pass. In vain he implored help, resorting to all sorts of tricks to get people to assist him in dragging the women on deck—in this grave situation nobody would so much as listen to him. Leaning against the cart, he gazed with inflamed eyes at the miragelike sight—the reddish reflections of the sun showing through clouds of dust above the stifling, warm river, and the impatiently hooting steamers, packed with corpses. The threatening roar of engines was heard again, and this time the bombs struck the ground not far away, and the bank was veiled in dust. Many of those on shore plunged into the Volga and swam up to an approaching steamer, crying: "Throw out a rope..." But no one threw them a rope, and their heads bobbed up and down in the water like black watermelons around the bows of the steamer.

Now there was only one steamer left—probably the last—a low yellow tug with battered paddle boxes. It did not go right up to the landing stage, but hove to near by, at a place, where there were no people. Kuzma Kuzmich turned the cart in the deep sand and, setting off at a trot, was the

first to arrive at the gangway, running up the boards and waving his arms wildly.

"Hi, Captain, Comrade!" he shouted to the little grey, old-time captain on the bridge. "I'm evacuating the wife and sister of the army group commander at the front—it's a matter of court-martial for you—you'd better let me have two of your crew to carry them to the tug...."

His excited face and resolute words had their effect. A morose, begrimed stoker in ragged trousers, stripped to the waist, climbed over the side of the ship on to the gangway.

"Where've you got them?"

"You won't be able to manage alone, Comrade...."

"I'll manage...."

The stoker went up to the cart, glanced at the women lying on it, and said, pointing to Anisya:

"Is that one the wife of the army group commander at the front?"

"Yes, that's her... if anything happens to her, we'll all be shot, I tell you...."

"Don't you try and fool me—that's our cook Anisya," said the stoker calmly.

"Are you mad, Comrade—where do you see a cook?"

"You needn't shout at me, old boy!"

Lifting Anisya lightly from the cart, he slung her on to his shoulder, and settled her there more comfortably.

"Give me a hand—I suppose we must take that one, too...."

He gathered up the two women in his arms and went with them towards the tug, the boards bending beneath his feet till they almost touched the water.

Kuzma Kuzmich, profoundly relieved, followed with a sack containing grain and fats, and a medicine pouch.

On the morning of the 3rd of July, the schoolmaster Stepan Alexeyevich carried mattresses, pillows, greenplush armchairs, and a pile of books and manuscripts, from a basement kitchen into a small yard. Next he staggered out bearing a mountain of dusty trousers, frock coats, skirts, and woollen dresses, which he threw on the ground, opening his mouth and wiping the streams of sweat from his face with his sleeve. He was soaking wet—his yellow hair and

beard, his canvas trousers and his dingy shirt, which, together with the braces, stuck to his bowed shoulder blades.

His mother, a flabby woman dressed in black, was sitting on a bentwood chair in the yard, feebly beating a carpet with a small stick. His paralyzed sister, who had a bulging forehead beneath which the rest of her face seemed small and flattened, was reposing blissfully in a wheeled chair in the shade of some acacia bushes. It was so hot, the very sparrows could hardly close their beaks.

"I think that's all, Mamma," said Stepan Alexeyevich. "I'm done up! Lord, what wouldn't I give now for a mug of cold beer!"

"We haven't got a drop of water, Stepushka! You'll have to take the pail and go for some, dearie."

"Mamma, I simply can't! Can't you do without? O-oh! This is a real curse!"

Stepan Alexeyevich gave himself up to acute despair: to fetch water meant going down the sloping bank of the Volga on which there were still heaps of ashes and the charred bodies of those burned in the *kvass* and lemonade stands, to wade up to the breast into the river, where the water was cleaner, to sink the pail and drag it up the hill, ankle-deep in sand, in this infernal heat. . . .

"Couldn't we hire somebody, it seems to me I'd be ready to pay 10 rubles a bucket. I think my heart is worth more. . . ."

"Do what you think right. . . ."

"But you, Mamma, would rather I strained myself over those pails myself, I think."

Not replying, his mother continued aiming feeble blows at the carpet. Stepan Alexeyevich breathed heavily, glancing at her plump face, down which streams of perspiration were coursing.

"Where's the pail?" he asked quietly. "Where's your pail?" he repeated, in a voice so disagreeable that his invalid sister beneath the acacias said imploringly:

"Don't Stepan!"

"I will, I will! I'll carry water for you, I'll carry pots for you! Till the end of my life I'll work like a hack in the shafts of a water cart! To hell with my future, my career, my thesis! Everything is over and done with! A lousy vacant lot,

charred corpses, a cemetery! Neither Denikin nor anyone else can restore anything!"

He began wringing his sweaty hands, as he had once done in front of Dasha. He intended at all costs to wriggle out of fetching water. Suddenly the big bell in the cathedral tower, which had been silent for over a year, boomed out with surprising resonance. It tolled, and the triumphant peal soared over the abandoned town, soothing all unrest. Stepan Alexeyevich stopped in the middle of a sentence, his gaunt twitching face suddenly grew peaceful, and he smiled, looking almost stupid.

"Stepushka," said his mamma. "You'd better dress properly and go to mass."

"He's an unbeliever, Mamma, he's an atheist," said the invalid beneath the acacias with quiet malice.

"Well, what if he is! He can at least show himself—as it is, people take us for Reds."

"What are you talking about, Mamma!" cried Stepan Alexeyevich petulantly. "Hardly have we got rid of the joys of Bolshevism, when you want to drag me into the swamp of middle-class vulgarity. Yes, you do!"

The last words were accompanied by a vicious sneer in the direction of the acacias, where his sister lay with her eyes closed, as if to prevent herself from hearing him. "Who considers me a Red? Only your Shaverdovs and Preisses. Vulgarians, nonentities. . . . To descend to their level, my God! It would be tantamount to the denial of one's very self. What was the good of all my studying and thinking, of all my dreams? It isn't because they drove me to live in a basement that I hate the Bolsheviks. Or because they carried off all the coal from the water-supply station. . . . No, I hate them for trampling my inner freedom underfoot. . . . I want to think as my conscience, my genius dictates. I want to read books which inspire me. . . . And I won't read Karl Marx, I won't, d'you hear—not if he's right a thousand times! I am I. And I won't kiss the hand of your Denikin, either, Mamma and Sister. . . . For precisely the same reasons. . . ."

Having said his say, gesticulating violently, in the full glare of 40 degrees Celsius, Stepan Alexeyevich most inconsistently dragged a frock coat and a pair of trousers from out of the heap of clothes, and descended to the basement. He reappeared in half an hour, fully dressed, in a shirt with a

starched front, and holding a uniform cap and a stick in his hand. Nobody in the yard said another word. He went out into the street and strode along the shady side towards the cathedral square.

Beneath the low acacia bushes, grey with dust, which surrounded the foot of the cathedral, sat a few tattered individuals. One of these shot a humorous glance upwards, straight into the eyes of the teacher, as he passed.

"A series of magical changes in a divine personality," he said in deep, audible tones.

Inside the railings was drawn up a khaki-clad squadron of dismounted Cossacks, and a platoon of cadets in full uniform, their greatcoats rolled at their backs, their messtins and shovels beside them, lay on the scorched grass. A group of townspeople stood about the cathedral steps. Among them, Stepan Alexeyevich caught sight of the unctuous haberdasher Shaverdov, attired in an embroidered Russian blouse, with his wife and two children; he also saw Preiss, the untidy, fussy little printer, a converted Jew, with his wife and six children. Stepan Alexeyevich nodded carelessly to them and went into the cool cathedral—his official frock coat gained him unhampered entry, and some people even made way for him.

Although the cathedral, which had been used as a food depot under the Bolsheviks, still bore traces of neglect—the glass in the huge windows being broken, and the peeling walls displaying inscriptions such as: "potatoes, 94 sacks... received by" (signature illegible)—the radiant sheen of the innumerable candles in the gold icon stand, the incense rising to the dome, the responses of the deacon, echoing beneath the vaulted ceiling like the roars of wild beasts, the passionless childish voices of the choir, produced a mixed impression on Stepan Alexeyevich. He felt at the same time the familiar sense of solemnity, and the equally familiar sense of abasement—and the cockily held tail of the intellectual went of itself between his legs.

Up in front, facing the altar, stood the great men, the dictators: ten generals, some short, some tall, some stout, some lean, in snow-white tunics with soft, wide, gold and silver shoulder straps. Each of them held his peaked cap in his left hand, drawing two fingers and thumb of the right hand over his chest in a careless sign of the cross every time the deacon came out with his: "We beseech Thee, O Lord!"

And in front of these, on a separate carpet, stood a general of middle height, in a loose khaki tunic, and trousers with braid down the seams; his greying hair, combed backwards over his head, seemed to be a little worn on the nape of the neck. He raised a small, plump, extremely white hand much less frequently than the other generals, crossing himself slowly, with a sweeping gesture, placing his bunched fingers firmly against his wrinkled, slightly sloping forehead.

Stepan Alexeyevich guessed that this was Denikin. He gazed eagerly at him, his thin lips still bearing the smile of bitter scepticism, which had now become habitual to him. An officer in the congregation, watching him attentively, moved unnoticeably nearer, till he was standing by his side. Stepan Alexeyevich was absorbed in his conflicting emotions. The white hand of General Denikin held him entranced. Who does not know the hands of generals, and the drowsy languor peculiar to them? None can force his hand to look imposing, try as he may, and these vain efforts always make the hand of a general absurd, especially when the Chief holds it out condescendingly for you to shake, or tries to infuse with distinction his nerveless sausagelike fingers, while dealing cards, or tucking a napkin beneath his chin. All this is indisputable. But the white hand of Denikin had seized history by the throat, its movements had set armies hurling themselves into bloody battles....

These thoughts so agitated Stepan Alexeyevich that he did not notice that the service was over, or that the priest, a little old man in spectacles, had come to the pulpit and, his eyes on General Denikin, had begun to address the assembly:

"The historical order of our beloved leader, Commander in Chief of the White forces of South Russia, Lieutenant General Anton Ivanovich Denikin, has been burned like a fiery sign into the heart of every Russian professing the faith of the Orthodox Church. The order of the Commander in Chief begins with the words: 'Having as our ultimate aim the seizure of Moscow, the heart of Russia, I order on this, the third of July, the beginning of a general offensive....' Gentlemen, it is as if the skies had opened, and the voice of the archangel Michael were summoning his pure, white army...."

Stepan Alexeyevich felt a pricking sensation in his nose, his chest rose and fell beneath the starched shirt front, which

was growing limp with perspiration... he was seized with ecstasy. He watched Denikin's hand slowly rising to his forehead. Suddenly Stepan Alexeyevich knew that he must kiss this hand, he must.... And when, a few minutes later, Denikin, the first to kiss the cross, walked up the carpeted aisle, so simple, with his clipped grey beard, just like a nice old gentleman, Stepan Alexeyevich, overcome by enthusiasm, strode impulsively up to him. Denikin stepped back, raising his hand in selfdefence, his face contorted by a grimace of pain and misery. He was immediately surrounded by generals. Someone seized Stepan Alexeyevich from behind by the elbows and dragged him down so roughly that his knees bent beneath him.

"But I only wanted...."

The officer who had seized him let his glance run rapidly over the countenance of Stepan Alexeyevich.

"How did you get in?"

"I only wanted to kiss his hand...."

"Show your pass."

The officer kept pushing Stepan Alexeyevich through the crowd, never letting go of him. When they got near a side entrance he summoned two youthful cadets armed with rifles, with a nod of his head:

"Take this fellow. To the commandant's office...."

"We have got right to Kostroma, as you will see, dear and much-esteemed Ivan Ilyich. I did not venture to go on shore anywhere, even Nizhni Novgorod did not seem to me a reliable place as regards military accidents. So we landed at Kostroma, on the outskirts of the town, and took up our quarters in a little wooden house over the Volga with mountain ash and guelder roses in the garden, and everything just as it should be. It's a nice little town, standing on hills, just like Rome, and so still and remote! And that's just what we need.

"Darya Dmitrevna is recovering, though slowly—she is still extremely weak, I carry her from her bed out into the yard, like a little child. She seems to have the appetite of a wolf, though she can't speak and can only make signs with her eyes: 'Food!' There seems to be nothing but eyes left of her—her face is no bigger than a fist, and she often cries

out of sheer weakness, the tears just flow down her cheeks. She was delirious and unconscious almost three weeks, while the tug paddled its way up the Volga. Her delirium was restless and agonizing, her soul continually struggling with phantoms from the past. An important part was played, astonishing as this may sound, by some jewellery, diamonds or something, which she thought she had obtained after some crime. And in delirium she seemed to be speaking in two voices: one accusing, the other justifying—such a thin, whimpering little voice. I would not tell you this but for a remarkable chance discovery. . . .

"Firmly bearing in mind your order—to feed our dear patients well—and setting this before me as my chief task, I more than once lost heart and even became panic-stricken. The times are cruel. People are either thinking on lofty planes and indulging in emotions on no less a scale than the universe, or saving their skins with naked cynicism. And in both cases everyday mercy is lacking. You can win over some, and intimidate others, but to soften hearts, to get a dozen or so pounds of bread by one's tears of hunger, is usually an impossibility.

"All the superfluous trifles that we took with us I exchanged for bread, eggs and fish. I was again and again tempted to sell Darya Dmitrevna's cloth coat, the one she ran away in from Samara in the autumn. But I refrained not so much from common sense, seeing that autumn will soon be here, as because this coat invariably turned up in Darya Dmitrevna's delirium, like a sort of accusation, though how this was, I could not understand. So I had to resort to cunning, to deceiving trustful souls and to actual theft. Here I was helped by palmistry. I would encounter a village woman with a sack on her shoulder, on the landing stage, and begin chattering, all the time feeling for her weak spot. There always is one, you only need a little worldly wisdom. I would start a conversation about Antichrist, there's a lot of talk about him on the Volga, especially above Kazan. It doesn't take much to frighten a foolish woman. I only have to get her confidence, and half the contents of her sack is mine. . . .

"Only yesterday, a Sunday it was, I was trying to put Darya Dmitrevna's clothes in order. It appears I am the only person in Kostroma who owns a big spool of thread-

a fact of no slight importance—and people fairly make pilgrimages to us, there is always someone who needs to sew on a trouser button, or make a patch. . . . I make no bones about taking foodstuffs for this. I was sitting on the steps one day unfolding Darya Dmitrevna's coat—you probably remember it, it has a plaid flannel lining. Supposing I were to take out the lining, I thought, and make a lovely skirt of it! Her old skirt is all in holes . . . and a lining could be made of something not so good. I was so pleased with the idea that I asked Anisya Konstantinovna what she thought. She agreed. 'It would make a nice skirt,' she said, 'unpick it.' But when I began unpicking it, diamonds came falling out of it, valuable ones, thirty-four stones altogether. . . . So you see the delirium was a dream come true! That same day I showed the stones to Darya Dmitrevna. And suddenly I saw she had remembered. There was entreaty and horror in her eyes, and you could see her lips wanted to shape words. . . . She's forgotten how to speak. . . . I bent down to her pale lips and she lisped out the first words she has spoken since her illness: 'Throw them away, throw them away. . . .'

"I don't dare to do anything without you, Ivan Ilyich. I don't know where she got these treasures from and why they are so odious to her, I don't know how to act—I'm afraid to keep them in the house, but I consider it would be irrational to throw them away. I assured Darya Dmitrevna that I had rowed out into the middle of the Volga and thrown the stones into the river. She calmed down at once and her eyes brightened, as if she had at last got rid of something sticky. . . .

"Excuse me for telling you all this in such detail, Ivan Ilyich, but I always was a chatterbox. Find some way of letting us know how you are, and whether we should spend the winter here or try to push on to Moscow. . . .

"I remain, as ever, eternally devoted to you and Darya Dmitrevna.

"Kuzma Nefedov. . . ."

"I've brought the mail," said Sapozhkov, getting into the wicker carriage and settling down in the hay beside Telegin. "Congratulations, Ivan!"

"All this is very sad, Sergei Sergeyevich. If I could choose I would stay here as commander of our Kachalin men. New people, new cares—it's not the thing for me."

"Why make yourself out an old man?"

"It'll pass—I suppose I'm a bit tired. . . ."

The horses cantered along the field path, the wicker sides of the carriage creaked, a forest of oaks loomed dark on the left, and to the right could just be discerned in the twilight the diagonally stacked wheat sheaves. There was a smell of wheat straw. The August stars shot across the sky.

"Who'll be your chief of staff in the brigade?"

"They'll find somebody."

The road turned closer to the forest, which exuded a faint moisture. The horses began whinnying.

"No letters for me, of course?" asked Telegin.

"Oh, sorry! There is a letter for you, Ivan."

Ivan Ilyich, who had been sitting huddled up, weary and drowsy, threw himself forward.

"Sergei Sergeyevich, how could you! Where is it?"

Sapozhkov rummaged long in the pouch. They reined in the horses and struck matches, which hissed for a moment, just before their heads dropped off. Telegin seized the letter—it was from Kuzma Kuzmich—and turned it over and over.

"It's a very fat letter—he's written a lot," whispered Sapozhkov.

"Is that a bad sign?" Telegin whispered back.

He jumped out of the cart and walked over to the edge of the forest, where he started hastily breaking up twigs, and, setting a lighted match to them, blew on the flames.

"Take a sheaf, it'll blaze up at once!" and Sapozhkov ran and fetched a wheat sheaf, and then retired. The straw caught fire immediately. Telegin squatted down beside it to read his letter. Sapozhkov watched him read, wiping his eyes on his sleeve, and reading the letter a second time. So it was all up with her. Sergei Sergeyevich sniffed and got back into the cart for a smoke. The old man on the driver's seat, who wanted to get home as soon as possible, said:

"You'll miss the train if you don't hurry—further on the road is nothing but sand, and we'll have to look for a place to ford . . . that'll delay us, too. . . ."

Sapozhkov did not look at Telegin as the latter climbed into the cart, weighing it down heavily on one side, before

he sank on to the hay. The horses started at a trot. Over Sapozhkov's head, covering a distance equal to three million light-years, stretched the Milky Way, with its misty, bifurcated tail. The wobbly back wheel of the cart creaked, but the old driver paid no attention to this—if it breaks, it breaks, and there's nothing to be done about it. . . .

Telegin spoke in a choking voice.

"The strength of spirit in her!" he said. "The incessant struggle for renewal, for purity, for perfection. . . . I'm positively shaken. . . ."

"Is she alive then?"

"What d'you think? She's in Kostroma, and she's recovering."

Sergei Sergeyevich turned towards him and they both burst out laughing. Sapozhkov punched Telegin, and Telegin punched him back. Then he recounted in detail the contents of the letter, only omitting the bit about the diamonds. These must be those very valuables she had written to her father about the year before, acquired when she had been struggling so shamelessly for her life, while at the same time destroying herself. It must have been in those days of her perplexity that Dasha had sewn the stones into her coat. And she had never so much as mentioned them to him. She had probably forgotten all about them—that would have been so like her! Forgotten, and only remembered in delirium. And then—"throw them away, throw them away!" A wave of ecstatic emotion swept over Ivan Ilyich. Of course there was much that was obscure in this whole affair, but then he had never attempted to understand Dasha thoroughly.

"One thing is clear to me, Sergei Sergeyevich," he said, "it's a great bit of luck to have earned the love of a woman like—well, like Dasha."

"Yes, you've been very lucky—I always said so."

"Oh, how one has to keep oneself up to the mark, Sergei Sergeyevich! And sometimes one comes a cropper. . . . I expect you do sometimes, too, don't you?"

"It's quite different with me."

"Surely you must be always longing to find a woman like my Dasha!"

"Somehow women don't play such a part in my life. . . . I look at those things much more simply . . . without any fuss. . . ."

"There you go again! I know you. . . . Life is keyed up to higher levels now, Sergei Sergeyevich: victory or death—that's all that matters now. And—we live! We live in the full sense of the word. All trifles should be purged from our relations with women. . . . Love must be cherished. Always on the alert! Have you ever tried looking into beloved eyes? It's the miracle of life. . . ."

Sergei Sergeyevich made no reply, and his cap gradually worked right on to the back of his head—he was looking at the Milky Way again.

"Somewhere up there, there's a gap in the universe," he said. "A black, starless place shaped like the outline of a horse's head. . . . It looks very terrifying in a photograph. The time will come when we shall understand, quite simply and clearly, that there is no horror in immeasurable space. Every atom of our bodies is an immeasurable starry system. On either side is infinity. And we ourselves are infinite, and everything within us is infinite. And you and I are all the time fighting for infinity against finiteness. . . ."

Ahead of them showed the vague outlines of what looked like tall trees but turned out to be mere low riverside bushes. A chill fragrance was wafted from the river. The cart began going downhill. The horses snorted loudly, and plunged nervously through shallow water.

"So long as we don't fall into a hole," said the old man.

But they forded the river without mishap. Once across, the driver leaped from his seat as nimbly as a boy, and ran alongside the cart, holding the reins and clucking to the horses, which drew the cart uphill over the sand, stopping at the top with heaving sides. The old man got back to the driver's seat. They were not far from the station now. He turned to his passengers:

"Nothing will come of all these goings-on," he said. "He's killing people for nothing. In our village they say: 'we're not going to give the land back anyhow, we can't be overcome by force, it isn't 1906 any more, the muzhik is stronger, he fears nothing.' They threw leaflets from an airplane over Kolokoltsovka," here he pointed into the darkness with his whip. "The peasants read them—he wants to buy back the land. That's how things are now—he doesn't count on us giving it back free, any more. . . . Never mind—we can wait! He'll go back the way he came! Oh, Denikin, Denikin!"

Telegin and Sapozhkov arrived in the morning at the headquarters of the Southern Front, which were in Kozlov, the realm of apple orchards. This is the real Mother Russia! Cottages with faded roofs, geraniums in tiny windows. Columns of dust rose in the wake of the dilapidated droshky, bumping over the uneven cobble-stoned road, past forlorn-looking telegraph posts, with fragments of paper kites sticking to the wires, past a brick-built village store with an awning, the door boarded up with planks nailed crosswise, past a barefoot girl scuttling across the road, holding a bandy-legged, tottering baby brother by the hand, past the unswept rubble from a ruined wayside shrine, next to the public drinking trough on the dirty square, where there used to be a market and now was nothing. Behind rickety fences, from which half the palings had been torn, were apple trees, weighed down by apples, red and waxy-green. And over orchards and roofs flew a merry flock of starlings, all showing together the underside of their wings.

It seemed as if the inhabitants could have lived here timelessly another thousand years if it had not been for that occurrence—the revolution. But after all there was nothing here to cry over—life had been pitifully mediocre. Only people had had plenty of sleep.

“And just think,” said Sapozhkov, bouncing up and down beside Telegin in the droshky, “across the sea, seconds are transferred into terms of money, and a man is turned out on a gigantic lathe to make him suitable for industry, and goods are turned out in the factories like in a nightmare—ten million human beings had to be killed to get a breathing space for trading all these goods. Civilization! And here paper kites hang from the telegraph wires.... Look at that man in the window over there, just waking up and scratching his unkempt head.... And we are making a leap into the unknown right from here—to build up what humanity has dreamed of.... There she is—Mother Russia! Life is good, Ivan... the apples smell delicious, almost like a healthy wench.... If only I live long enough! I feel I shall write a book....”

The droshky took them to the headquarters of the front, from all the open windows of which came the clatter of typewriters.

While they waited for their turn Telegin and Sapozhkov learned all the war news. The gist of what they learned was as follows: the armed forces of Commander in Chief Denikin, which had been held up by some temporary hitch, were now moving on Moscow again in three groups. The North Caucasian Army of General Wrangel (from which the Tenth Red Army had succeeded in breaking away at the price of abandoning Kamishin) was advancing along the Volga, cutting off Central Russia from the grain regions of trans-Volga and Siberia; Ataman Sidorin, with the two *élite* cavalry corps of Mamontov and Shkuro as a spearhead, was leading the Don Army, reorganized by Denikin's protégé, Ataman Bogayevsky, in a strong push towards Voronezh; the Volunteer Army under the command of Mai-Mayevsky, a talented general, but nearly always drunk, was developing an offensive over a wide front, at one and the same time clearing the Ukraine of Red troops and guerilla detachments, and aiming its "fist"—General Kutepov's guard corps—at Moscow, via Orel and Tula.

Denikin's military successes were self-evident—his supplies were excellent, his Volunteer regiments, though much diluted with peasant contingents, fought with confident audacity. But the spirit in his rear was becoming more disquieting every day, and he was disastrously inclined to underestimate this: the Kuban was demanding separation, complete independence, and in order to establish there the supremacy of Russia, it had been found necessary to hang two extremely prominent members of the Kuban Rada; bloody conflicts were going on on the banks of the Terek; the Don Cossacks replied to the declaration of a march on Moscow with the words: "The Quiet Don was ours and will be ours, let Denikin take Moscow himself"; in the territory occupied by the Volunteers the peasant question was solved with military simplicity—by ramrods; governors, district chiefs, and tsarist gendarmes, were being put in office again, and once more the muzhiks, as they had under German occupation the previous year, were sawing off their rifles and waiting for the Red Army; Makhno, having contrived to shoot his principal rival, Ataman Grigoryev, with his own hands, had openly declared free anarchist order throughout the districts in the vicinity of Ekaterinoslav, rallying around him some fifty thousand bandits, and threatening to snatch

Taganrog, the Crimea, Ekaterinoslav and Odessa away from Denikin. . . . And now the "Greens," a special form of ataman groups, deserters to a man, appeared upon the scene, and wherever there were hills and forests, there they were—harrying Denikin's flanks.

The Red Army, after the severe reverses suffered by its Thirteenth and Ninth armies, and the heroic retreat of the Twelfth from the Dniester and the Bug, had straightened out its front. Its morale was improving and its fighting capacity increasing, largely owing to the mass influx of Communists from Petrograd, Moscow, Ivanovo, and other northern towns. The Commander in Chief's order for a counteroffensive was awaited daily.

Their new appointments confirmed—Telegin as commander of a separate brigade, Sapozhkov, as commander of the Kachalin Regiment—they returned the same day, discussing the whole way back the significance of the news they had heard. Both were agreed that Denikin's spectacular plan had no solid foundation, and that he would never be able to repeat in Great Russia his last year's successes in the Kuban: he had beaten Sorokin there, but this time he would have Lenin and the true, hereditary proletariat to deal with, and the muzhik in these parts was a tough customer—a descendant of those who had pitchforked Napoleon out of Russia.

"Colours to the front! Remove the sheath!"

The colour-bearer, and the two men on guard beside him—Latugin and Gagin—stepped forward. Telegin, handing over the regiment to its new commander, Sergei Sergeyevich Sapozhkov, was grave, and moodily concentrated, the very colour had fled from his tanned cheeks. In his hand was a sheet of paper, on which he had jotted down the heads of his speech.

"Kachalin men!" he said, and glanced at the Red Army men, standing at attention: he knew each one of them, knew each man's wounds and cares—these were his own people. "Comrades, you and I have marched thousands of miles, in winter cold and summer heat. . . . You covered yourselves with glory twice at Tsaritsyn. . . . Retreating—through no fault of your own—you yielded the foe, at a heavy price to him, a temporary and uncertain victory. Your glorious

exploits have been many—they are not written in sounding narratives, and the reports of them have been lost in the innumerable details of official bulletins. . . . But never mind that. . . .” (Telegin took a rapid glance at the paper in his clenched hand.) “I warn you—there are still more hardships ahead, the foe is not yet beaten, and it is not enough to beat him, he must be annihilated. . . . In this war it is absolutely essential to conquer, to fail to conquer is an impossibility. Human beings are fighting wild beasts—human beings must be the victors. . . . Or, to give another example: when the grain begins to sprout—so green, so frail—it pierces the black earth, it pierces the rock. There is all the power of a new life in the sprouting grain, and this life must come to birth, it cannot be halted. . . . We have gone into the fight for the new, bright day on a cold, bleak morning, and our foes want a dark night, fit for bandits. But our day will come, though the foe fairly bursts with rage. . . .” (He glanced nervously at his notes again, and then crumpled up the bit of paper.) “I admit, Comrades, I shall miss you, I shall have a hard time without you. . . . It is no small thing to have sat together throughout a whole year, around campfires. I am leaving you, bidding farewell to your fighting colours. It is my wish—my demand—that it may always lead the glorious Kachalin Regiment to victory.”

Taking off his cap, Ivan Ilyich went up to the colours and, lifting the edge of the faded, bullet-riddled fabric to his lips, kissed it. Then he put on his cap, saluted, closed his eyes and frowned so violently that his whole face was screwed up into wrinkles.

The farewell feast which Sapozhkov and all the commanders had clubbed together to give him had left Telegin with a reeling head. Seated in the basket carriage, holding beside him his kitbag (which contained, among other things, Dasha's china kitten and puppy), he remembered with emotion the speeches made at table. It seemed as if people could not possibly have loved one another more. They had embraced and kissed and squeezed one another's hands. Oh, the fine, honest, true souls! The youthful commanders, springing to their feet, had toasted the world revolution in words which were naive and high-flown, but fraught with

conviction. The Battalion Commander, a quiet, modest fellow, had suddenly felt an impulse to get on the table, and get on the table he did dancing a furious Cossack dance amidst gnawed goose bones and watermelon rinds. At the memory of this, Ivan Ilyich laughed aloud.

The cart stopped just before leaving the village and three figures approached—Latugin, Gagin, and Zaduiviter. They all greeted him, and Latugin said:

"We thought you wouldn't forget us, Ivan Ilyich, but you did."

"Yes, we waited for you," corroborated Gagin.

"What's this, Comrades? What do you mean?"

"We waited for you," said Latugin, putting his foot on the hub of the wheel. "We've lived side by side a whole year, we have given our very souls to one another. But you don't seem to care, so I guess it's good-bye. . . ."

His voice was angry, trembling.

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Telegin, getting out of the cart.

"What are we doing here, in the infantry?" said Zaduiviter. "We don't belong. Are we to trudge in the dust for ever?"

"Naval artillery—you won't find people like us everywhere," said Gagin, his eyes gleaming.

"There were twelve of us at Nizhni," said Latugin, "and now there are only three—four, counting you. And you drive off with a gay farewell. And we're not human beings, we're only privates, grey greatcoats. . . . You used to know us, and suddenly we no longer exist. But what's the good of talking to you, you're drunk!"

"Now that you have a whole brigade under your command," interpolated Zaduiviter, "you'll have heavy artillery of your own. . . ."

"To hell with your artillery!" exclaimed Latugin. "I'm willing to clean latrines if necessary! It's losing the human being that I can't bear! I trusted you, Ivan Ilyich, I loved you. . . . Do you know what it means—to love someone? And now it seems I'm just the fifth from the right for you. Well, no use talking. . . . You'll understand what hasn't been said, on your way. . . ."

"Comrades!" Ivan Ilyich was instantly sobered by this talk. "You have judged me prematurely. I intended all the

time to send for you three to my artillery park as soon as I got to the brigade."

"Thanks for that," said Zaduviter, his face clearing.

But Latugin stamped the ground with his broken boot.

"He's lying! He only just thought of it." Then, in softer tones, but raising a bent forefinger menacingly towards Telegin: "Conscience alone is not enough, Comrade, you can't get far on it. But thanks all the same."

Laughing, Telegin clapped him on the shoulder:

"What a hothead! You're unjust, you know."

"What the hell do I need justice for—I'm not out to deceive anybody. But you're such a simple fellow—one has to forgive you. That's why the women fall for you. All right then, don't be angry, get back into the cart." And then, holding Ivan Ilyich's elbow firmly: "D'you know what it is to throw one's self on the enemy's sword for a comrade? You've never had to?" His light, wide-apart eyes, at once cold and passionate, roved over Ivan Ilyich's features. "You were lying just now, weren't you?"

"Well, I was. And you did well to remind me, to put sense into me. . . ."

"That's the way to talk!"

"Let go of him—can't you let him alone! We're sick of you and your lord of creation!" boomed Gagin.

Ivan Ilyich took leave of them without another word and got back into the cart; on the way he kept chuckling and shaking his head for a long time.

The headquarters of the Special Brigade could be reached in an hour by plane, or in a little over 24 hours by horse. Ivan Ilyich went by rail spending four days in the train, changing again and again, and passing weary, stupefying hours at filthy, famine-stricken stations. Of course the saloon car which he had been solemnly promised was not forthcoming, and the last lap of the journey he had to travel in a cattle van, half loaded with chalk—for whom and for what purpose required at such a time it would be hard to say. To crown all there was a passenger with a fat face, like a jug wearing pince-nez, lying on one of the ledges, and incessantly singing an air from one of Offenbach's operettas. "Toulouse ham, Toulouse ham! But ham without wine is too salty. . . ." When it grew dark, the passenger began fumbling in his luggage, transferring things from one sack to

another, taking something or other out, sniffing at it and thrusting it back again.

Ivan Ilyich, weary almost to nausea, and hungry too, began to distinguish very clearly the smells of all sorts of food. When the wretch began cracking, peeling and eating a hard-boiled egg, sniffing all the while, it was more than Ivan Ilyich could bear.

"Look here, citizen, the train stops in a minute, and you will get out of here, with your sacks instantly!"

In the dark, the passenger stopped munching and sat motionless. A moment later Ivan Ilyich was conscious of the pungent smell of sausage right under his nose, and angrily pushed away an invisible hand.

"You misunderstood me, Comrade soldier," said the passenger in a mellow tenor voice. "I'm only inviting you to have something to eat and drink. A-a-h!" He sighed, and again Telegin's nose told him that sausage was being held out to him. "It's all principle with us now, all principle! But what has principle to do with Ukrainian sausage? It's got garlic and lard in it. And there's just a sip of spirits for each of us." He waited expectantly, and Telegin kept silence. "You probably take me for a profiteer or a black-market-er.... Excuse me—I'm an artiste. I may not be Kachalov or Yuryev or Mamont Dalsky, the Lord have mercy on his black soul! That was a great tragedian! He fancied himself the leader of world anarchy, the blackguard, and took a fancy to plundering Moscow mansions—and anyone sitting down to cards with him had to watch out. My name is Bashkin-Razdorsky, not unknown in the provinces—my name was always among the first...." He seemed to be waiting for Telegin to exclaim: "Oh, Bashkin-Razdorsky! Of course! Charmed to make your acquaintance!" But Telegin maintained a stony silence. "I acted in Moscow for two seasons—at the Hermitage and the Korsh theatres.... Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko had his eye on me even then. 'No, no,' I told him, 'let me act my fill—then you can have me....' In 1918 we opened at the Korsh with *The Death of Danton*—I played Danton ... a roaring lion, a people's tribune, with a curling lip ... a bull, a wild beast, a genius, a glutton, a sensualist.... You should have seen me! What a success! But there was no fuel, Moscow was in darkness, no box office sales, the company dispersed. Five of us toured

the provinces, with *The Death of Danton*. Commissar for Education Lunacharsky forbade us to give it in Moscow, but in the provinces we let ourselves go—we hauled a guillotine on to the stage in the last act, and down fell my head with a bang... tickets sold like anything. You should have heard them shout: 'Chop off his head again!' We played Kharkov and Kiev—that was while the Reds were still there—and then Uman, in the shed of the fire brigade, Nikolayev, Kherson, Ekaterinoslav. On an evil day we decided to go to Rostov-on-Don. We had a wild success there. An officer actually started shooting at Robespierre from a box... but the next day the mayor sent for me and punched my face in the good old way: 'Pray for Commander in Chief Denikin—I would have hung you.... Out of Rostov with you this very minute!' Yes, it's hard to be an actor nowadays.... We wander about from one godforsaken hole to another, like gypsies. Our scenery's so dilapidated, it's a disgrace to set it up... they wouldn't let us take the guillotine into the railway carriage at Kozlov, said it was an object of unknown application.... So we were reduced to cutting off my head with an axe! Got a match? If you have I could show you: I've got my head here in a bag. It was made in Moscow by a property man in the Maly Theatre—a genius! And as for the censorship: You produce your copy, and the comrade reads and reads.... You explain: This is a historical fact.... He thumbs the pages again.... 'And where's the guarantee that it's a historical fact?' You show him an enthusiastic review by Lunacharsky... he reads that too.... 'Couldn't you give us something a little more cheerful?' Fairly grates on your nerves, you know.... I don't know what's going to happen to us now.... We're going to act at X. in the headquarters of the Special Brigade...."

Telegin surprised him by asking:

"And where's your company?"

"In the next van, with the scenery. Robespierre's riding in the engine cab—he's Tinsky, you've probably heard of him, he's the best Robespierre in the Republic.... One thing you may be sure of, he'll find spirits wherever he is. A genius! He always goes in the engine cab, and we can all ride in peace. So what about it, Comrade soldier, shall we have a bite? Don't say no!"

"All right, I won't say no...."

"You'll oblige me exceedingly." Bashkin-Razdorsky fumbled in his bags, grunting, and whispering: "Where on earth did I put it?"

An egg, a bit of sausage, a rusk, found their way to Telegin's hand. "When we've finished at X, we'll go on to Moscow.... We've had enough of gipsying! An Armenian—a genius!—has set up an eating shop in Number 5, Neglinni Passage. Sausages, fried steaks, anything you like. The militia raid it every day. They can't make it out. All the customers smell of spirits, but search the place as they may, they can't find any spirits, and they never will.... He keeps a container on the fourth floor, in the attic, attached to an empty water pipe. And downstairs, in the shop, there's a sink and an ordinary tap. You just turn on the tap, and pour yourself out a tot."

Munching pleasurably at the sausage, and feeling the mellifluous influence of a few sips of spirits, Telegin assured his fellow traveller:

"I'll try and arrange all conveniences for you; rest and rehearse, and don't be in a hurry—but get up a good show for us. You'll be my guests at X., I'm the Commander of the Brigade."

"Oo-oo-oh!" sighed Bashkin-Razdorsky, "so that's who you are.... And I kept looking at you and thinking—there sits my downfall! How you frightened me! I kept talking, talking, and wondering how it was I wasn't chucked out of the train. We'll act for you, old man, we'll act with a will, for art's sake, like true actors!"

Telegin got off the train with his kitbag. An oil lamp with a broken chimney shed a feeble light on the figures of some military men on the platform.

"Good evening, Comrades," said Ivan Ilyich, approaching them. "Are you expecting the Commander of the Brigade? If so, it's me, Telegin. Excuse my appearance...."

Shaking hands with each in turn, he glanced with surprise at one of them—grey-haired, dry, severe, with military carriage.... As they passed out of the station into the dark square, he cast another glance at him over his shoulder, but was still unable to discern his features. Ivan Ilyich was put into a droshky, and driven long over pitch-dark fields, reeking of dung heaps. The cart drew up in front of a long building,

like a shed with a high-pitched roof. Here a room, freshly whitewashed, and almost empty of furniture, had been prepared for Ivan Ilyich. On the window sill stood a lighted candle and a plate of food, with another plate inverted over it. He threw his kitbag on the floor, took off his tunic, stretched, and, seating himself on the side of the clean, newly-made bed, began pulling off his chalk-smearred boots.

There was a gentle knock at the door.

"I ought to have blown out the candle immediately, now there'll be endless talks, and it's five o'clock, damn it!" he said to himself in vexation, but aloud he said:

"Come in!"

The grey-haired military man he had already noticed came in quickly, shutting the door behind him, and raising a stiff hand to his temple in a brief salute.

Telegin, stamping on the heel of the boot he was pulling off, stayed as he was, gazing with all his might at this double. . . .

"Excuse me, Comrade," he said. "It was rather awkward on the platform, but I thought I'd better postpone introductions and business of all sort till tomorrow. . . . If I'm not mistaken you are my Chief of Staff. . . ."

The military man, still standing at the door, replied briefly:

"I am."

"Would you mind telling me your name?"

"Roshchin, Vadim Petrovich."

Telegin looked at him in helpless wonder, opening his mouth and taking several gulps of air.

"Aha! So. . . ." Then his face quivered and he went on, almost in a whisper: "Vadim?"

"Yes."

"I see, I see. . . Very strange. . . . You're—on our side, my Chief of Staff. . . . Good heavens!"

Speaking as firmly and unemotionally as before, Roshchin said:

"I decided to have a talk with you now, Ivan, so as not to make it awkward for you tomorrow."

"I see. . . a talk. . . ."

Ivan Ilyich rapidly pulled on the boot he had almost removed, picked up his tunic and began putting it on again. Vadim Petrovich, lowering his head, followed Telegin's movements with attention, but without the slightest impatience or emotion.

"I'm afraid you and I may have difficulty in understanding each other, Vadim."

"I don't think we will. . . ."

"You're a very clever fellow, yes you are. . . . I loved you dearly, Vadim. I remember our last year's meeting at the station at Rostov. You displayed great generosity. . . . You always had a warm heart. . . . Oh, my God!"

Ivan Ilyich tightened his belt, twirled his buttons, fumbled in his pockets, either from excessive embarrassment, or to postpone the inevitable unpleasant talk. . . .

"You probably consider," he said, "that we have changed places, and that I, in my turn, ought to display great feeling . . . and I have great feeling for you, very great feeling. . . . We have been as closely bound together as any two men could be. . . . But . . . what are you doing here, Vadim? Why are you here? Tell me. . . ."

"That's what I came for, Ivan."

"Very good. But if you think I'm going to help you to cover up. . . . You're a clever chap—let's agree: I can't do a thing for you. . . . You and I are in radical disagreement here. . . ."

Telegin frowned and averted his eyes from Roshchin. But Vadim Petrovich heard him with a smile.

"You've been up to something," continued Ivan Ilyich, "and it's pretty clear, what. . . . And the rumour of your death no doubt enters into that plan. . . . Tell me, but I warn you I shall arrest you. . . . Oh, it's all so. . . ." Telegin made a gesture of despair which seemed to include Roshchin and himself, and the ruin of his life. Vadim Petrovich moved swiftly up to him, threw his arms round him and kissed him firmly on the lips.

"You're a good chap, Ivan . . . simple and straightforward as ever. It does me good to see you like that. . . . How I love you! Let's sit down," and he pulled Telegin, still resisting, down on to the bed. "Don't be an ass! I'm not a spy or a secret agent. . . . You needn't worry—I've been in the Red Army since December."

Ivan Ilyich, not yet quite recovered from the decision he had come to, which had shaken him to the depths of his being, gazed, betwixt doubt and belief, into the deeply-tanned, harsh, and at the same time tender countenance of Vadim Petrovich, into his intelligent, burning dark eyes. They sat

down on the side of the bed, not letting go of each other's hands. Vadim Petrovich began recounting all that had led him to this side—had led him home, to his native land.

Telegin interrupted him in the very beginning of his narrative, to ask:

"And where is Katya? Is she alive, well—where is she now?"

"I hope Katya is now in Moscow. . . . She and I missed each other again. I got to Kiev too late, just before the evacuation. . . . But I came upon her trail. . . ."

"And does she know you're alive, and on our side?"

"No . . . and that's what's driving me mad. . . ."

* XIX *

Two months passed.

It was not possible to halt the offensive of General Denikin's armies. Kolchak, the supreme ruler of Russia, was pressing on to the Urals in a last desperate effort. A veritable sea of misfortunes broke over the Seventh Red Army in the Baltic region, where, through impassable mud, relinquishing, one after the other, Pskov, Luga and Gatchina, it was forced to retreat before General Yudenich, who had issued his troops the order: "Break through to Petrograd!"

The Soviet Republic was completely cut off from its sources of grain and fuel. The transport at its disposal scarcely sufficed for the conveyance of troops and munitions. The October sky wept above the Russian land, above famine-stricken, paralyzed cities, where life smouldered in the expectation of a still more hopeless winter, above smokeless factory stacks and abandoned workshops, whose workers were scattered over all the fronts; above the graveyards of engines and shattered railway carriages, the eternal stillness of straw-thatched villages, where there were now so few men left, and where, as in the days of our forefathers, the rushlight flickered, and, in some houses, the hand loom once more clattered.

In this bleak season General Mamontov broke through the Red front a second time and, overrunning its rear and destroying all its communications, made a deep raid with his Cossack corps.

Telegin, Roshchin and Commissar Chesnokov, a new man recently sent to the brigade in the place of the former commissar, down with typhus fever, bent over the tattered map, stuck together with saliva. Chesnokov was a Moscow worker, whose health had been broken at hard labour under the tsar, and by undernourishment, so that he had become prematurely old. Smoothing his balding forehead, as if his head ached just above the eyebrows, he read for the tenth time the Commander in Chief's operation order.

Telegin sucked at his pipe. Of late he had stopped smoking home-rolled cigarettes, and grown much attached to his pipe—a present from Latugin, who had taken it from a White officer while scouting. It had become his consolation and sedative in difficult moments, of which there had been any amount recently, and if left uncleaned for long would whistle as cosily as a samovar of a cold evening.

Vadim Petrovich, who had immediately realized that the order was one of mere despairing hysteria, waited for the Commissar to finish his meditations on this staff composition, leaning back against the log wall, his eyes gleaming angrily from beneath the half-shut lids.

They had taken up their quarters in a farmstead some five or six miles from the front, where brigade headquarters was housed. In the two regiments taken over by Telegin in August, there remained, after two months' fighting, scarcely three hundred soldiers—the reinforcements sent could scarcely be called soldiers. The High Command had rallied them hastily, mainly from deserters, "Greens," caught in the towns and villages where they were seeking shelter from the autumn rains. Without the slightest training or instruction they were crammed into replacement companies and taken to the front, where they were supposed to carry out missions, so far meticulously executed only by the movements of a red pencil over a tactical map in the solemn stillness of the Commander in Chief's office.

"I don't understand," said Commissar Chesnokov, examining the back of the order, though there was nothing written there. "I can't get the hang of it. . . ."

"There's nothing to understand," replied Roshchin. "It's a typical official order. The Commander in Chief, after breakfasting on two eggs and a cup of cocoa, lit an expensive cigarette, and strolled over to the map. His Chief of Staff, who

only longs to wake up one fine morning and discover that the appalling nightmare is over, pulls out of the map, with two fingers, a little red flag representing the 123rd regiment of our brigade, officially reported to consist of 2,700 men, and sticks it daintily in again, 60 miles further south. 'Thus, occupying the village of Dermovka we create a menace to the enemy's flank....' Then he pulls out another flag, standing for the 39th regiment of our brigade, which has 2,100 men accredited to it in the military bulletin, and sticks it 45 miles to the southwest. 'And thus, the 39th makes a frontal attack, and so on....' The Commander in Chief screws up his eyes at the map through the smoke of his cigarette, and agrees, knowing that the Chief of Staff has thought it all out overnight, and had lines and arrows carefully traced in red and blue ink, and knowing also that whether the flags were arranged this way or that, the result would be the same: lively activities at the front ... which was what was required...."

"Look here," Chesnokov interrupted him, shaking his great bald head. "That's not criticism, mate, that's pure spite."

"I know it is... But why should I hold my tongue if that's what I think? And Telegin thinks the same, and the men think the same, and say so."

Telegin gave a deep sigh, not removing the pipe from his mouth. And in the Commissar's breast bitterness, doubts and confusion—all that he had been trying to suppress—were beginning to arise. It was not so much that he had fallen behind the times during his ten years of tsarist hard labour, as that the times had become really too complicated—there seemed to be morasses wherever one turned. His heart, purged by years of suffering, did not know how to set about distrusting people who were fighting on the side of revolution. He loved all such persons at sight, and again and again it turned out that they were harbouring treacherous thoughts. He liked Roshchin's bitter frankness, feeling that he was afraid of no one, and not to be intimidated, even by a gun trained against his forehead.

"Well, what is it the men are saying, after all?" asked the Commissar. "We'll soon be issuing wadded coats and *valenki*, and their talk will be quite different. Who is it that chatters? Deserters? They're soaked to the marrow by the rain, and their bellies are empty, that's what makes their teeth chatter."

"When are we issuing *valenki* and wadded jackets?" asked Roshchin.

"They promised me faithfully in the commissariat for supplies. I've seen the invoice. . . . They promised fifteen hundred geese and half a truck of fats. . . ."

"Didn't they promise you roast birds of paradise?"

In reply to this sally the Commissar only grunted. It was true that he had so far only been able to offer the brigade promises and papers. He had gone to Serpukhov, and sworn violently over the telephone, spent sleepless nights striding over the floor of the hut, as in his prison days. . . . Something incomprehensible was going on: wherever his revolutionary sense ventured, some mysterious barrier arose, in which everything was entangled and confused.

"Still—what *do* they say?" asked the Commissar.

Roshchin thrust his finger viciously at the order.

"It says here: 'two companies occupy the village of Mitrofanovka and the farmstead of Dalni, and hold them.' We have already occupied the village of Mitrofanovka and the farmstead of Dalni once, complying with the orders of the Commander in Chief. And we ricocheted out of them like bullets. Exactly the same thing will happen the day after tomorrow, when we carry out what is written here."

"Why?"

"I'll tell you why. . . . This position cannot be held, and we ought not to attempt to go there."

"Quite right," said Telegin, nodding with the pipe in his mouth.

"And we will go there, lose a hundred men in this operation, penetrate the White front without having any contact with friendly troops, and when they squeeze us on both flanks, we will immediately jump out of that sack, which will mean crossing the river three times, and being shot at in the process, then an open field where we will be attacked by cavalry, and a swamp in which half our carts will stick."

"But this village and farmstead must be in some way essential to the general strategical plan," objected Chesnokov.

"No. . . . Look at the map. . . . That's just what the men are talking about—that there has been neither sense nor object nor plan in all these operations of ours for the last two months. . . . We are marking time without the slightest prospects, bearing quite unnecessary blows, losing men, losing our

faith in victory. . . . You'll see—a few score men will desert tonight. . . . And a month later they'll be brought back to us. . . . What has happened, I ask, what is going on? Paralysis!

Making a bubbling sound through his pipe stem, Telegin said:

"I was told in the squadron today—how the devil do they find out these things—that Mamontov has crossed the Don again, and is marching in our rear."

Roshchin seized the order, let his eyes run over it, threw the sheet of paper down, and once more threw himself back against the wall.

"Highly probable," he said. "But here . . . not a hint. . . ."

A man on duty—a short, bearded fellow, carrying a dirty canvas cartridge pouch, entered the hut.

"Comrade Brigade Commander, you're wanted on the telephone."

Telegin looked at the Commissar in surprise, and went out, hastily getting into his greatcoat.

"To hear you, Roshchin," said the Commissar, again passing a hand over his forehead, "a man might lose all his faith. What does it all mean? Is there treachery among us?"

"I suggest nothing, and I state nothing. I only know that we can't go on making war like this. . . ."

"Must the operation order be fulfilled?"

"It must, and tomorrow I shall fulfil it. . . ."

After a moment's thought, the Commissar said, with a chuckle:

"Are you tired of life?"

"That has absolutely nothing to do with the matter, and is none of your business. . . . And I'm not tired of life either. . . . If you hadn't been with us such a short time you would know that the regiment does not wish to carry out this order. But they will have to. . . . The whole life of an army is in the fulfilment of operation orders. The only alternative is ruin, anarchy, death. I shall read the order to them myself and lead them to the attack . . . consider this operation a test of discipline. . . . and that's all there is to say about it. . . ."

Just then Telegin came back and sat down beside them not taking his hands out of his pockets. His eyes were round with astonishment.

"Comrades, the Chairman of the Supreme Military Council is visiting the front. He'll be here in an hour. . . ."

One hour passed, and then another. It began to drizzle. The commandant's detachment and the squadron were drawn up in a body on the grazing land behind the farmstead. Rain-drops glistened in the rippling manes of the horses, on their carefully combed tufts, the folded greatcoats of their riders. The horses were churning the mud beneath their hoofs. With their protruding ribs, sagging shanks, and drooping lips, they resembled nothing so much as carrion salvaged from the water. Immerman, the commander of the squadron, a former first lieutenant of the Grodno Hussars, a round-faced individual with a boyish snub nose, glanced at Telegin in despair. Disgrace! And to crown all, a grimy puppy with lumbering paws suddenly made its appearance and sat down in front of the squadron in a pose of amiable curiosity.

Immerman hissed and shooed at it, but the puppy only pricked up its ears and put its head on one side. And then a mounted signalman, posted not far off on a rising in the ground, hastily dug the spurs into his horse's sides, turned its head, and galloped heavily up to Telegin, scattering mud on all sides.

An enormous dazzling radiator and widely spaced headlights flew almost vertically up the slope, and a long, open, light-grey motorcar came into view.

Its powerful roar caused the horses in the squadron to shift their feet uneasily and toss their heads; "'tenshun!" commanded Immerman. The car stopped, almost running over the puppy, which shuffled away sideways as if stuffed with cotton wool and resumed its former pose. Telegin rode up, raised his sword in salute at random to one of the three military men seated in the car, all of whom wore tan raincoats over their greatcoats. The one sitting beside the driver got up to receive the report, placing his hand on the wind screen, and not looking at Telegin.

Then he turned sharply towards the squadron. The two on the back seat, one as white as a sheet, with a rainsoaked beard, the other, stout, pompous, fierce-looking, rose and saluted. He began speaking in a barking voice, throwing his head so far back that his nostrils showed up like black spots, and his blurred pince-nez danced on the bridge of his nose.

"Soldiers, in the name of the workers' and peasants' power, I order you to sharpen your swords and fix your bayonets firmly. Which of you does not desire to water his horse

in the estuary of the Quiet Don? Only a coward does not desire this. . . . Why are you still here, and not yet there? The Republic expects heroic feats from you. Forward! Over throw the enemy and scatter his ashes over our mother steppe. . . ."

He went on more and more vehemently, all in the same vein. When he stopped speaking he cast a glance over the lines. "Hurrah!" he shouted, raising his clenched fist over his head, and the men responded in ragged unison. This speech disturbed them. They felt as if they were listening to a man who had fallen from the moon. They had expected anything but this—to be called cowards!

The orator summoned Telegin with a nod.

"I am dissatisfied with the state of your troops—mere riff-raff on horseback. I am dissatisfied with the state of your mounts—they're simply hacks. Follow me. . . ."

He sank on to the seat beside the driver. The huge car started forward towards the farmstead.

Telegin rode after it, hurriedly turning things over in his mind—there was a strong likelihood of it all ending in his being shot. . . .

The car drew up before the hut in which headquarters were housed. Telegin galloped up, followed by Chesnokov, bumping awkwardly up and down in his saddle. The telephone operator on duty stood in the entry with a frightened face, one hand raised in salute, trembling. His eyes silently implored Telegin's permission to speak. Stammering in his efforts to express himself officially, he reported that a minute ago brigade headquarters had called him up—(all the departments, property, funds and archives of the brigade were housed about 35 miles east, in the village of Gaivoroni). They had just had time to tell him that there had been a raid of White mounted patrols on the village of Gaivoroni—probably Mamontov's men—and then the line had been cut off.

The pompous military man—he was Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief—sank heavily on to one knee and, leaning forward to the front seat, whispered something in the ear of the Chairman. The latter nodded, and flung over his shoulder at Telegin:

"You will receive my instructions by field post."

Silent and stunned, Telegin and Chesnokov stared for a long time down the black road, over which the monster machine dashed, dissolving like a vision into the rainy mist.

Dasha got work in the Executive Committee, Amelioration Department, as second assistant to the chief of the Project Bureau. Sometimes she painted spots in water colours on the map of the Kostroma District, where it was proposed to drain the bogs, and obtain inexhaustible supplies of turf and swamp ore. Sometimes she copied notes drawn up by engineer Gribosolov for the purpose of keeping the Executive Committee in a state of continual nervous excitement with the magnificence of ideas which were in reality completely sterile, since, with the exception of a box of water colours, some paint brushes and a small supply of Whatman paper, the Department for Amelioration had nothing at its disposal—neither spades, carts, horses, pumps, money, nor labour.

Dasha received rations—a quarter of a pound of bread with bits of straw in it, and sometimes a few laurel leaves or peppercorns. Anisya worked in the Executive Committee as a messenger, and received extra rations in recognition of her services in battle—in addition to the two ounces of bread, and the peppercorns, she got one and a half smoked fishes, and sometimes a rusty-looking salt herring.

Besides working at the Executive Committee, Anisya was a member of a dramatic circle, and was always rushing off to popular lectures at the department of history and philology of the university, evacuated here from Kazan. Anisya entertained the utmost contempt for her main duty, which was to sit in readiness in a dilapidated high-backed armchair at the door of the Vice Chairman of the Executive Committee. Clutching at her head, and closing her ears with her fingers, she would sit doubled up over one of Shakespeare's tragedies, when called answering with an absent-minded: "Coming!" She would even "answer back," if too insistently required to take a missive to one of the innumerable rooms, cluttered with tables, and crammed with people who had invented posts for themselves. And sometimes she would simply absent herself from work. Once when a pasty-faced woman employee reprimanded her for all this, Anisya looked at her so dourly: "You needn't raise your voice, Comrade, I didn't fear the Cossack's sword..." that the good woman, who belonged to the intelligentsia, and had formerly laboured arduously for the cause of woman's emancipation, thought it best to give

this insolent representative of the workers and peasants a wide berth. . . .

Dasha got home some time after five. Anisya sometimes came late at night. They lived in a little wooden house overlooking the Volga. Kuzma Kuzmich, never forgetting his promise to Ivan Ilyich—to keep Dasha and Anisya well fed—continued, against his conscience, to engage in dubious dealings for obtaining edibles and fuel. And he sometimes had a hard time of it—his years were making themselves felt, and the autumn chills made him more inclined to quiet philosophical meditation before the stove, with the soft murmuring of the rain on the roof, than to bustling about.

When the half-light of early morning was already tinting the windowpanes blue, Dasha and Anisya usually drank carrot tea and ate a snack before going to work. Kuzma Kuzmich, after washing up, emptying the slop pail, and sweeping the floors in the two tiny rooms, would give himself up with many a sigh to meditations and conjectures—where was he to obtain a couple of eggs, a scrap of bacon, a bottle of milk, half a hatful of potatoes, today? Kuzma Kuzmich did not go begging—God forbid! He merely bartered philosophical and moral ideas for articles of nourishment. In these two months the whole of Kostroma had got to know him, and more than once he had even found his way to outlying villages.

While thinking, he usually mended or sewed up something in the gradually increasing light at the window. Life is a mighty force. Even in times of the most profound historical progress and severe trials, human beings issued from their mothers' wombs head first, demanding with an angry cry a place in this world, whether it suited their parents or not; people fell in love, not reflecting that they had infinitely less means of support than, say, the blackcock who dances and spreads his magnificent tail on the spring courting ground. People are always seeking consolation, and are ready to cut off the half of a loaf for anyone who pours unlooked-for balm into their bosoms, perpetually wrung with doubts: "What will become of us? We shall have to eat grass and cover our nakedness with a cabbage leaf." Others are grateful for a sympathetic listener to whom, without fear of the district Cheka, they can turn their seething and resentful minds inside out.

Kuzma Kuzmich would set off for the farms. Wiping his feet in dark entries, he would go into the kitchen. Sometimes a housewife would exclaim angrily:

"That parasite again! I have nothing today, nothing whatever. . . ."

"I've come to ask after Matryona Savishna," Kuzma Kuzmich would reply, nodding his red face in friendly greeting, and pursing up his lip. "Is she bad?"

"Very bad."

"Anna Ivanovna, it's not death that is terrible, it's the consciousness of a life lived in vain which fills us with despair. That's what a person needs consolation for—for someone to lay a hand on his brow, as it grows cold in death, and say: 'Your life has been nothing much, Matryona Savishna, and you need not mind leaving it, but you worked like the smallest ant—you carried your straw with weary conscientiousness. And work is never wasted, everything is of use—the human edifice grows wider and taller, and somewhere in its walls is your bit of straw. You have brought up children and grandchildren, and now the evening of your life has come. Close your eyes, sleep peacefully. Have no regrets, your misery has not been your fault. . . .'"

Kuzma Kuzmich rambled on, from his stool by the door, and the housewife, who had been slicing up kindling for the fire, suddenly threw down the axe and sighed rapidly several times, the tears running down her cheeks.

"You live your life and when you die, nobody will say a word of thanks. . . ."

"That's because life is still full of injustice. . . . Everybody should have a monument put up to him for the work he has done. . . . That's how it'll be in the time to come, Anna Ivanovna, life will be good in the days to come. . . ."

"Do you mean in the next world?"

"No, no—in this one."

"You're the only kind fool so far. . . ."

"It's my profession, Anna Ivanovna, it isn't kindness. . . . I'm brimful of curiosity. It isn't pity that human beings need. What they like is for somebody to take an interest in them. Well . . . may I go to Matryona Savishna?"

"Oh, go on in."

Kuzma Kuzmich never left a house like this empty-handed. In the evening, after sawing and splitting a board taken from

somebody's yard, he would heat the stove in the women's quarters, and blowing the ashes from the boiling samovar, as he set it on the table, would relate his adventures to Dasha and Anisya.

"A rival has appeared," he said once, breathing on a saucer. "An old man in a shirt made of sacking, barefoot, with his beard carefully messed up, and a marvellously imposing nose, spreading all over his face, has begun prowling from house to house. His name is Father Angel. The rascal has invented a simple tale—he bursts into a house, sits down on the floor, and begins swaying from side to side and throwing out his hands, and moaning: 'Angel, Angel—you wouldn't believe, pfui, pfui . . . and now you've seen it with your own eyes, touched it with your own hands, pfui, pfui, pfui. . . .' His hearers gape, he minces and simpers a bit, and then begins to tell them: the other day, a Thursday it was, some woman whose husband is in the Red Army gave birth to a lusty baby boy with all its teeth. They washed it and swaddled it, and put it into the mother's arms. She offered it the breast, but it wouldn't take it, and gave her such a look, and said: 'Mother, Mother, I have come!'" Kuzma Kuzmich chuckled, sipping from his saucer. "Angel will steal my clients. And he's so jealous! We met in a yard today, and he made a long nose at me. 'Come for my leavings, Kuzma? If you follow in my footsteps you'll soon get a taste of my rod!'"

"Stop all this nonsense, Kuzma Kuzmich," said Dasha severely. "Get yourself a job under the Soviets. Never mind us, we'll live on our rations. People are beginning to say horrid things about you—I don't like it. . . ."

Anisya, who seemed, as ever, to have only just emerged from a dream, remarked:

"I talked to a man today, such a beast." Here she began mimicking her interlocutor's expression and voice. "I was sitting and reading, of course. And one of our employees from the Department of Civil Supplies came up—all rotten and flabby and crooked-mouthed.

" 'I should very much like to make the acquaintance of your uncle,' says he.

" 'What uncle?' says I.

" 'The one you live with,' says he. 'I need some spiritual counsel from him.'

" 'He doesn't give counsel,' says I.

" 'I heard he does. Lots of people go to him and obtain relief.'

" 'I have no time to listen to your nonsense, Comrade,' says I—'can't you see I'm busy?'

"Then he said in my ear, all dribbling:

" 'Haven't you heard about the talking baby?'

" 'Go away,' I says to him. 'Go to hell. . . .'

" 'There's not very far to go,' he says. 'We've all been in hell for ages. . . . What d'you think—is this baby the Anti-christ?' "

"Most unpleasant," said Dasha.

"Yes, this is a godforsaken hole," said Kuzma Kuzmich, thoughtfully pouring out another glass of hot water. "Such a hole—one's ears fairly ring. But Russians are inquisitive folk, you know, inquisitive and impressionable. They have wonderful heads. All they need is knowledge and the right path out of this Byzantine maze. I've been wanting for a long time, my dear, precious women, to propose that we make our way to Moscow, but I couldn't quite bring myself to say so."

"To Moscow?" echoed Anisya, her blue eyes widening.

"To the light, to ideas, to get nearer to great affairs. I'll stop all my fooling, upon my word I will. . . . I've been sick of it myself for a long time. . . . And ever since I saw my own portrait—Father Angel—I've been thoroughly upset. . . ."

"To Moscow! To Moscow!" said Dasha. "We even have a place to roost in: Katya had a room in an old lady's flat—Marya Kondratyevna, her name was. . . . There may be nothing left of it. . . . Oh, Kuzma Kuzmich, don't let's put it off, there's a darling. . . . We are selling what is dearest to us here, for your doughnuts and cheesecakes. And you've become quite different here—you've deteriorated terribly. . . . Listen! As soon as we get to Moscow we'll send Anisya to a dramatic school. . . ."

Anisya said not a word to this, only blushed scarlet and lowered her lids.

"Go tomorrow and find out if there are any steamers to Yaroslavl, Kuzma Kuzmich!"

Dasha—too excited to say a word—only sighed. Kuzma Kuzmich sat hunched up, his hands pressed against his stomach, telling himself that there was not likely to be any risk in Moscow as far as feeding the women went: if the worst came

to the worst there were still Dasha's precious stones, which he had secretly hidden. . . . And they could take a few sacks of rye flour from Kostroma. . . . What had made him blurt out the idea of going to Moscow all of a sudden? Well, he'd done it now, and that was that! And no doubt it was all for the best. . . and he began composing in his head an explanatory letter to Ivan Ilyich, from whom a short post card had recently come, telling them that he was alive and well, and sent love and kisses.

Anisya, leaning her elbows on the table, gazed at the feeble flame of the night light, seeing in her mind's eye now the staircase (like the one in the Executive Committee) down which she would go with bare shoulders, trailing her silken train, and wiping her bloodstained hands against each other, now the long deal box, the coffin from which she would rise and see Romeo and the phial of poison. . . .

They all three sat for a long time beside the humming samovar. The night whipped at the panes of the tiny window in gusts of rain. But what did they care about bad weather, wretched lodgings, all the trivial miseries of every day? Their hearts were feverishly, confidently beating on the threshold of life, as if endowed with everlasting youth. . . .

Ivan Ilyich considered himself a steady character: with all his faults, he never lost his head. And now it had to happen that, without a moment's thought, as if struck with blindness, he unfastened his holster with shaking fingers and drew out the revolver, holding it to his head and pulling the trigger. There was no report, for somebody had for some reason removed the cartridges.

Roshchin and Commissar Chesnokov turned on Ivan Ilyich with floods of invective, calling him a poor sap, an intellectual, a rag not even fit to wipe a mare's backside with. This scene was enacted in a field, where they had dismounted beside a hayrick, dark and sodden with rain. Not far away stood the squadron and the commandant's detachment, now mounted. These were all that remained of Telegin's brigade.

Mamontov's corps had attacked his rear on a wide front, cutting it off from all contacts, destroying its means of communications, and laying waste to the supply and munition depots in the village of Gaivoroni. In a few days the whole

rear of the brigade was reduced to chaos, in the midst of which, lacking contact of any sort with any echelon of command whatsoever, scattered units and isolated individuals retreated, hid, wandered aimlessly about.

Before they had time to recover, both infantry regiments found themselves trapped—Mamontov's troops at their heels, the Don Cossacks in front. The Red Army men abandoned the front and scattered in various directions.

The dimensions of the catastrophe came to light gradually, a bit at a time. Telegin went in search of his brigade with the squadron and the commandant's detachment. He still retained a hope of rallying some sort of remnants—the panic had passed and Mamontov was already far away—but it was soon evident that it would be impossible to get men together beneath the leaden sky, amidst the swelling stubble, impassable pastures, mist-filled gullies and copses.

Some went in search of a front-line unit which they could join, others were scattered among neighbouring farms, standing beneath windows and begging for shelter and a chance to get warm, and yet others—seizing the long-awaited opportunity to escape from the battlefield—made for their homes, their wives, and their warm hearths.

Two Red Army men from the 39th regiment, so emaciated that it was all they could do to keep themselves in a sitting position against the hayrick, had a sorry tale to recount to Telegin, Roshchin and the Commissar, who came upon them unexpectedly.

"No use going over the field, you won't find anyone," said one of them. "There was a regiment, but there isn't one any more."

The other, still sitting and leaning against the rick, bared his teeth.

"They've betrayed us—that's all. . . . D'you think we don't understand operation orders? We understand everything—we have been betrayed. To hell with your command! Giving us cardboard boot soles!" And he wagged the toes sticking out of his boots. "We've done with fighting . . . done. Amen!"

It was at this rick that Telegin had suddenly broken down. The huge radiator with the headlights on either side floated into his memory. What would he be able to say for himself now? He had made a terrible mess of everything, with that lazy benevolence of his.

"Stop swearing at me!" he said to Roshchin and Chesnokov. "Well, I was weak, I fucked—sorry!" and he stuffed the revolver back into the holster, grimacing horribly. "I've been too lucky—I knew my luck would turn one day. Well—the Revolutionary Tribunal can try me. . . ."

"Who's thinking of you at such a moment, damn you!" shouted Roshchin, a muscle in his cheek twitching. "Where do you intend to lead the squadron? East? West? What are your plans? What is your immediate task? Think!"

"Give me the map. . . ."

Telegin snatched the map out of Roshchin's hands, bending over it and muttering all sorts of obscenities directed against himself. The names of towns, villages and farmsteads jogged up and down before his eyes. But at last he overcame this, too. After some arguing it was decided to move eastward, in the hope of meeting with units of the Eighth Army.

The whole of the rest of the day they rode at a brisk trot wherever this was possible. When it grew quite dark, so that they could not even see their horses' ears, scouts were sent ahead to find the village of Rozhdestvenskoye, which was swallowed up in the darkness somewhere quite close. They reined in their horses, and waited a long time without dismounting. Vadim Petrovich moved his horse up to Telegin's, his knee touching Telegin's knee.

"Well?" he asked. "Perhaps you'll explain now? Can one speak to you?"

"You can."

"What was the play acting about?"

"What play acting, Vadim?"

"The scene with the unloaded revolver. . . ."

"You must be mad!" Ivan Ilyich bent from the saddle towards him, but all he could make out was a faint blur with dark sockets in it. "So it wasn't you who took out the cartridges, Vadim?"

"I take the cartridges out of your revolver! I begin to think you're deeper than you seem. . . ."

"I don't understand. . . . Say I fucked—is that being deep? In your place I would never have referred to it. . . ."

"No hedging, now!"

They spoke in low voices. Roshchin was shaking like a hunting dog on a leash.

"The whole squadron had a fine view of that disgusting scene at the rick. . . . D'you know what they're saying? That you were acting a comedy . . . that you were thinking of saving your skin before the Revolutionary Tribunal."

"What the hell d'you mean?"

"Just hear me out, will you?" Roshchin's horse, too, began to show signs of restiveness. "You've got to answer me in all sincerity. . . . Days like these test a man's quality. . . . Have you passed the test? Do you realize that you bear a stain? You have no right to bear a stain. . . ."

Roshchin's horse, curvetting, lashed Telegin's face painfully with its tail.

At this, Ivan Ilyich growled out in a choked voice:

"Move away, or I'll run you through with my sword. . . ." And immediately came the voice of Commissar Chesnokov from the darkness:

"Enough of that squabbling, mates! *I* took out the cartridges."

Neither Roshchin nor Telegin said a word in reply. They could not see each other, but both were breathing stertorously—the one smarting under the insult, the other still bristling with rage. Suddenly the darkness was rent by cries as brief as gunshots.

"Halt, halt!" "Who are you?" "Leave go of me!" "Which side are you on?" "We're on the right side—what about you, blast you?"

It was two scouting parties which had clashed, the riders dancing round one another, fearing to draw their swords in the infernal darkness, but reluctant to let slip an opportunity for a fight. They shouted and swore, the vigour of their language at last bringing mutual conviction that both sides were Reds.

"What are you hanging on to my bridle for, then?"

"What unit?"

"What the hell is that to you, you son-of-a-bitch? We're a big cavalry unit."

"Where's your unit?"

"Come with us. . . ."

Both sides at last calmed down and rode peaceably up to the squadron. The village of Rozhdestvenskoye turned out to be quite near, on the other side of the wood, and across the river. When asked what were the troops in the village some-

body from the strange scouting party replied, with scant courtesy: "You'll see when you get there. . . ."

Semyon Mikhailovich Budyonny and two of his divisional commanders were seated in a hut, drinking tea around a big samovar. At the entrance of Telegin, Roshchin and Chesnokov, Budyonny said cheerfully:

"Here come our reinforcements! Glad to see you! Sit down and have tea with us."

They went up to the table and shook hands all round, beginning with Budyonny, who eyed the wandering brigade commander and his staff quizzically (he knew all about them). The Commander of the Fourth Division was a short man, but his imposing moustache could have been tied round his neck. The Commander of the Sixth Division extended a huge hand to the newcomers, and squeezed their hands as if he were trying to bend a horseshoe, while maintaining an expression of profound equanimity on his youthful, ruddy countenance.

Semyon Mikhailovich enquired if their unit was well quartered for the night, and if they had any complaints or requests to make. Roshchin replied that they had settled down as best they could, and that there were no complaints.

"Good!" said Budyonny, who knew very well that not even a fly could have settled down comfortably in the village, where his cavalry corps was stopping overnight for a brief breathing space. "Why are you standing? Take a seat. I remember you very well, Comrade Telegin—it was your unit which gave the Don Cossacks such a warm welcome. . . ." And well pleased, he screwed up his eyes and glanced at his companions at the table. The Commander of the Sixth nodded calmly, in corroboration of the fact that the welcome had indeed been a warm one, while the Commander of the Fourth Division bent his Kalmyck countenance with proud dignity. "So this time Mamontov gave you quite a drubbing, eh? What have you brought with you—a service or a fighting unit?"

"A fighting unit, a reinforced squadron," said Telegin.

"What shape are your horses in?"

"In first-rate condition," put in Roshchin hastily, "their front hoofs are shod."

"Fancy that—their front hoofs are shod!" echoed Budyonny admiringly. "I've been thinking—why should you go a long

way looking for the Eighth Army. Perhaps it isn't there any more. . . ."

"I must report to the Commander of the Army," said Telegin.

"You can report to me. . . . What d'you say, Divisional Commanders—shall we take in the Brigade Commander and his reinforced squadron?"

Both divisional chiefs nodded their assent. Budyonny took a pinch of tobacco out of a tin and began rolling it into a newspaper cigarette.

"There's no point in your going so far," he repeated. "Join up with us. The Divisional Commanders and I were sitting here thinking, and at last we came to the decision—our horses are getting fat, our men are bored—let's go north and look for General Mamontov. So here we are—he running away from us, we running after him. . . ."

Budyonny could joke, but the situation was extremely grave. Learning of Mamontov's corps having broken through the Red front, he had disobeyed, at the risk of his life, the personal order of the Chairman of the Supreme Military Council to fulfil strictly a military plan long discredited and now clearly seen to be inane, if not treacherous, and had hurled himself, on his own initiative, into the pursuit of Mamontov. Both Budyonny and his divisional commanders fully realized the fury with which the pens must have squeaked in the office of the Commander in Chief and the threats awaiting them at the other end of the trunk line—threats which smelt of the grave for them. But the safety of Moscow was more to them than their own heads. And they could only see this safety in the immediate pursuit of Mamontov, the destruction of this, the Whites' best cavalry. And they were fully confident that, unable to sustain the attack of Budyonny's seven thousand swordsmen, this cavalry would lie chopped to pieces on the broad fields between the Tsna and the Don. It would be no mean feat to overtake Mamontov, who had acquired from the bandits the habit of exchanging his injured and battle-worn horses at villages and farmsteads.

Mamontov's regiments of Don Cossacks, dashing fighters, whose heads had been turned by success, were numerically stronger than Budyonny's cavalry. But Mamontov did not

seek an encounter, he feared the experienced foe pursuing him. It was no mere guerilla band of horsemen, but that most dangerous thing of all, which it might spell disaster to come up against in the open field—trained Russian cavalry. Budyonny moved more slowly, but with greater wisdom, sometimes selecting a shorter or more convenient path, sometimes forcing Mamontov into positions where it was hard to obtain fodder or fresh mounts.

The pursuit went on day after day, a deadly game between two powerful bodies of cavalry. Mamontov's route was marked by smoke and the glow of conflagrations showing through the autumnal mists. He would hurl himself on the rear units of the Reds and then hastily bounce aside. But at last the day came when Budyonny outwitted and overtook him. Early one morning, when the old willows were just beginning to show like faint charcoal drawings against the vegetable plots, Semyon Mikhailovich and his squadron burst into the wretched hamlet in which Mamontov's troops were quartered for the night.

At that very moment a team of three chestnut horses came dashing out of a gate from the other end of the village, and made off at full speed. In an open carriage, turning round on the seat, Mamontov, bareheaded, his greatcoat open, fired several times at the bobbing head of the moustached horseman in the black Cossack cloak. He had recognized Budyonny, but the rifle danced crazily in his hands. The Reds pursued the team, but the chestnut Don horses bore the carriage away as on the wings of the wind.

Wild shrieks, the clatter of arms and isolated shots were still emerging from farmyards—the Cossacks forming the General's bodyguard were fighting for their lives.

Budyonny's men ranged the village, rooting out of odd corners various terrified individuals, some in their underwear, others so panic-stricken that they did not notice they had come out with only one boot on. These turned out to be musicians. They were surrounded with jeering laughter. Semyon Mikhailovich, riding up and learning the cause of the excitement, ordered them to bring out their instruments.

When the musicians saw that the Bolsheviks, instead of putting them to the sword, merely laughed, they ran off, dressed themselves in a trice, and brought out their stock in trade—huge helicons, horns and trumpets, the bugles were

all of pure silver. The Budyonny men clicked their tongues in astonishment. What a haul!

"Oh, well," said Semyon Mikhailovich, "at least we get a tuft of hair from a mangy cur. Can you play the *Internationale*?"

The musicians could play whatever was desired—among them were students from the Moscow Conservatoire, who had been wandering these eighteen months in search of earnings and white bread, drifting from town to town, fleeing from pogroms, questionnaires and street fighting, till at last, in Rostov, they were mobilized. Their band leader, a drink-sodden individual with a porous nose, even went so far as to vow that he had always been a convinced revolutionary. One glance at his spongy purple nose was enough to convince anyone of his harmlessness.

Once more Mamontov had evaded encounter. By a rapid manoeuvre his corps had wriggled away from contact. The pursuit was continued. But now his intention was clear—to reach his own side by breaking through the Red front. This was what Budyonny feared most of all, for it would bring to nought the whole campaign, and probably entail not merely answering for his actions to the Commander in Chief but (which would be a great deal worse) going before the Chairman of the Supreme Military Council.

It was unfortunate, too, that it had not been possible to establish any communications and find out what had been going on in the outside world all these days. . . . At last they reached the railway line. Budyonny galloped up to the station with his Chief of Staff and Commissar, and took his place at the Morse apparatus. The news that came to him over the wires was so astounding that he sent an urgent summons for his divisional and regimental commanders to come to the station.

They gathered in the refreshment room, from the big broken windows of which the squadrons could be seen marching up in formation, and crossing the lines. Behind them stretched a sombre sunset, pressed right against the rim of the earth by lowering clouds. The lines of horsemen bearing their regimental emblems aloft on their lances ascended the slope, looking like men of iron, infinitely powerful on their powerful steeds. Telegin was struck by the expression on the face of Roshchin, who stood at the window gazing at the reflec-

tion of the sunset—so proud it was, as if frozen in an ecstasy of rage.

"We should have known what she was like," he was saying in hollow tones, and Ivan Ilyich moved nearer to catch his words. "We had forgotten. . . . No punishment could be great enough for such treachery. . . . Kiss the earth for having forgiven you. . . ."

It was the first time Roshchin had spoken out since the quarrel at the rick. Telegin had understood that he was in anguish and that if he had kept silence it was most likely not so much from pride, as from his despair of being able to express his remorse—he could not simply say: "Forgive me, Ivan." And now, after the prolonged strain and weariness, he was momentarily overcome by the sensation of his lost, forgotten, newly regained native land, and this was at the same time his prayer for forgiveness. . . .

Ivan Ilyich, too, wanted to show his good feeling to Vadim Petrovich, to stamp out and send to the devil, as if there had never been any such thing, their idiotic quarrel, but he only got as far as clearing his throat. . . . And just then Budyonny came out of the telegraph office and was instantly surrounded. He addressed them as follows:

"Great news, Comrades. . . . I'll begin with the unpleasant part. Orel has been taken by Kutepov, Comrades. His scouts have almost reached Tula. This manoeuvre has enabled him to wedge himself into our front over a broad area. The 8th and 10th Armies have been forced back on the east. The 9th and 13th—on the west. . . . But all this was last week." Budyonny paused, his eyes twinkling. "Since then there have been great changes, Comrades. In the first place you will be glad to hear that the whole of the High Command has been changed. And the Chairman of the Supreme Military Council is no longer boss on the Southern Front. . . . We have recaptured Orel. . . . The illustrious troops of Kornilov, Markov and Drozdovsky have been beaten into a cocked hat between Orel and Kromi. . . . What we have been so long awaiting has begun. . . . Details are as yet unknown, but a special shock group is striking successfully against Kutepov. . . ."

Again Semyon Mikhailovich paused, turning the strip of telegraph tape over in his hands, then, his moustache twitching, he sent an eagle glance over the faces of the commanders surrounding him.

"The operations of our corps were carried on not in accordance with the order of the Commander in Chief but against these orders. . . . We were told to go south into the Salsk steppe, to the Manich, where the 10th Army was almost shattered—we marched north. We turned up on the right bank of the Don, instead of on the left. We hung on to the tail of the Don cavalry, instead of retreating before them. That's not right, that'll never do! And as for our own simple reasoning, we have peasant heads, Cossack heads, we have no right to reason—there are folk with enlightened, educated heads in the staff of the Commander in Chief for that. . . . So on we went, and the orders from the Commander in Chief came after us—I didn't open them—never read them: if you start reading them your sword simply falls out of your hand. . . . Still, whether I liked it or not, the order caught up with me. . . there were no long words in it. . . ." He smoothed out the curling telegraph tape and read: "'To Cavalry Corps Commander Budyonny. Latest information received by our scouts indicates northward movement of enemy cavalry from Voronezh district. I order Cavalry Corps Commander Budyonny to annihilate this enemy cavalry. . . .' That's all, short and to the point. So, you see, our heads reasoned right. . . . The order is signed by Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front, Stalin, General Headquarters, Serpukhov."

Katya returned to Moscow, to the very house with the mezzanine in Starokonyushenni Street—a turning from the main thoroughfare of Arbat Street; the house to which Nikolai Ivanovich Smokovnikov and Dasha had moved from Petersburg at the beginning of the war, and to which she herself had come from Paris; the very room in which, on the mournful day of Nikolai Ivanovich's funeral, her own life had sunk into hopeless gloom. Then, huddled up on the bed beneath her fur coat, and deciding she could not go on living, she had crept sighing from beneath the coat, and gone into the dining room for a glass of water to wash down the opium . . . and had suddenly come upon her second lease of life in the dusk—Vadim Petrovich was sitting there, waiting for her. . . .

And now this, the second round of her life, tense, loving, anguished, had been fulfilled. The long path of irretrievable losses was behind her. Katya felt this with extraordinary poig-

nancy when she walked out of the Kiev railway station in Moscow, carrying her bundle. . . . Little boys and girls were splashing about in the shallows of the Moscow River, rending the stillness with their piercing, plaintive cries, and on the starved grass on the bank sat an old man watching his fishing rod. When she turned into Sadovaya Street, where the railings on either side of the tree-planted walk running down the middle of the road had completely disappeared, Katya was astonished at the silence. The only sound was the rustling of great lime trees casting an opulent green shade over abandoned mansions. On Arbat Street, formerly so noisy and bustling, there were neither trams, nor droshkies, and the rare pedestrians stepped over the rusting tram lines with heads drooping in dejection.

Katya walked up to the corner of Starokonyushenni Street and turned into it, her knees giving when she at last discovered her house. She stood a long time on the opposite pavement, looking at it. In her memory it had been a beautiful golden colour, with flat white pillars and shining, curtained windows, behind which dwelt the shades of herself, Vadim Petrovich, and Dasha. . . . Could that which had once been, disappear without leaving a trace? Does life fly by as a dream passes through the head of a sleeper, luring with sterile hopes, only to vanish with the first breath of awakening? Surely somewhere in those bygone days the unlooked-for joys were embedded—such as the moment when Katya, dropping the phial of opium on the carpet, had fallen helpless into the rigid arms of Vadim Petrovich, and Vadim Petrovich, almost paralyzed with emotion, whispered tender words into her ear.

That had been no dream. It had not vanished, it was still there, behind the dark windowpanes. And there, too, was their first night together, sleepless, passed in silent kisses, deep as grief, and in the repetition of the old, and yet eternally new words of astonishment at this, the one miracle in the world—the mingling of all that was tenderest with all that was manliest, the twining of tanned, powerful fingers with white, fragile ones. . . .

The little mansion stood there crooked, poverty-stricken, peeling, and there were no white columns on it. Katya had invented them. The two end windows on the first floor were covered from within by sheets of newspaper, the others were bespattered with splotches of dry mud, plainly showing that

no one lived there. . . . In the mezzanine, where Dasha's bedroom had been, all the windowpanes were broken.

Katya crossed the road and knocked at the front door, the brown paint on which was peeling in long strips. She knocked for a long time before noticing that in the place of the handle was a hole stuffed with dust. Then she remembered that the back door could only be reached from a side street. From the open gate a scarcely perceptible path led across the grass-grown yard. So there were people living here, after all!

Katya knocked at the door of the kitchen. A minute or two later it was opened by a little man, white as a sheet, fair-haired, bespectacled, with a big unkempt head.

"I shouted to you that the door wasn't locked. What d'you want?"

"Excuse me—I wanted to ask if Marya Kondratyevna lives here—she's an old woman."

"She does," he replied solemnly, as if he were solving a mathematical problem. "But she's dead. . . ."

"Dead? When did she die?"

"Not very long ago. I don't remember the precise date. . . ."

"Now what shall I do?" exclaimed Katya in consternation. "Is my flat occupied?"

"I have no idea whether it's your flat or not, but it's occupied."

He made as if to close the door, but seeing that the eyes of the good-looking woman were full of tears, hesitated.

"How dreadful! I've come straight from the station—where am I to go now? I haven't been in Moscow for two years, and I come home and . . . and. . . ."

"Home?" he echoed in astonishment. "To Moscow?"

"Yes. I've been in the south all the time, and then in the Ukraine. . . ."

"Are you in your right mind, I wonder?"

"Why? Is it so strange to come home?"

One corner of his lips twitched on the man's exhausted, paper-white face, wrinkling up the hollow cheek.

"Don't you know that people are dying of starvation in Moscow?"

"I heard it was hard to get food . . . but I don't need much . . . besides, it's only temporary. . . . When things are very hard it's better to be at home."

"And who are you, may I ask?"

"I'm a schoolteacher, my name's Ekaterina Roshchin . . . Wait a minute, I'll show you. . . ."

Katya loosened the knot of her canvas bag with her teeth and took out the certificate given her by the People's Commissariat for Education.

"I worked in Kiev right up to the evacuation, in a Russian school for little children. . . . The People's Commissar ordered me not to stay under the Whites. . . . I wouldn't have stayed anyhow. . . . And he gave me this letter to People's Commissar Lunacharsky. . . . But it's sealed. . . ."

The man ran his glance over the certificate, and the address on the envelope—all his movements were slow and languid.

"As a matter of fact the old woman's room is not occupied. If you insist on living here and nowhere else—then move in. . . . But everything here is rotting and falling to pieces. . . . In Moscow you can occupy any empty house you choose. . . ."

Moving aside, he let Katya into the kitchen, which was in semidarkness and cluttered up with pieces of broken furniture. He pointed to the key of the old woman's room, which hung on a nail in the smoke-stained passage, and went slowly into his own room (once Nikolai Ivanovich's study). With difficulty Katya unlocked the door into the stuffy room—with its two dirt-bespattered windows. This had been her bedroom and her bed was still in its old place, while the small carved medicine chest, from which she had taken the opium, with two faded Sirens of Russian folklore on the doors, was still hanging on the wall. The deceased Marya Kondratyevna had taken the best things out of all the rooms in the flat into this room, and sofas, armchairs, whatnots, all in a state of dilapidation, and covered with spiders' webs and dust, jostled one another.

Katya was seized with despair—she must begin life, the third round of her life, in huge Moscow, sweltering in the July sun, deserted, famine-stricken, in this stuffy room, cluttered with unnecessary things. She seated herself on the bare mattress and wept soundlessly. She was extremely weary, and she was hungry, too. The difficulties and complications before her seemed far beyond the little strength she had. She remembered the beloved little crooked hut next to the school, the garden plot, the hillocky field on the other side of the wattle fence . . . the twig broom at the door, the water butt in the entry, the greenish light streaming into the room through foliage, and falling on the children's exercise books

... the carefree, merry children, Ivan Gavrikov, her little favourite. . . .

Why could she not have stayed there for ever and ever?

Katya got off the bed to fetch herself some water to moisten the dry loaf she had brought from Kiev. But there was not even a glass for her to begin her new life with! Angry now, Katya dried her eyes and went to look for the pale man.

Knocking gently, she said in a high, thin voice:

"I'm sorry, I keep worrying you. . . ."

He approached slowly, opened the door and gazed fixedly at Katya, as if rallying his thoughts with difficulty.

"Excuse me, but could you let me have a glass, I'm thirsty."

"My name's Maslov, Comrade Maslov," he said. "What kind of glass do you need?"

"Whatever you can spare."

"All right."

He went back into the room, leaving the door open, and Katya could see numbers of books on sagging shelves of unplanned wood, a wretched iron bedstead, which also had books lying about on it, rubbish on the floor, and yellowing sheets of newspaper at the windows. Maslov returned as slowly as before and handed Katya a dirty glass:

"You can have it for good. . . ."

Katya reached the kitchen sink with difficulty; it was piled high with rubbish, but there was water in the tap. Washing the glass, she drank eagerly and went back to her room. Before eating her bread she wanted to open the window and have a wash. But it was not so easy to get the sealed frames open. She worked away, picking at the putty with loud sighs, and knocking at the bolts with the leg of a chair, breathing hard. The noise brought Maslov from his room, and he stood gazing at Katya in silent astonishment for some time.

"What d'you want to open the window for?"

"It's suffocating here."

"And do you think the air from the street is any purer? Nothing but dust and stench. Every yard is putrid. . . . I don't advise you to go on."

Katya listened to him from the window sill, then biting her lower lip, began knocking with the chair leg again.

"Suppose you do get it open," he continued, "you'll have to close it again in the evening. . . . Why waste so much energy?"

At last the bolts moved, and Katya, jumping down from

the window sill, flung open the window and stuck out her head, greedily inhaling the air of the street.

"Yes," said Maslov thoughtfully, "we haven't solved the city problem yet."

Suddenly his knees twitched and gave beneath him, and he looked round for somewhere to sit, but only leaned against the doorjamb, thrusting his thumb into the cord tied loosely round his dingy canvas shirt.

"The snow has melted and the dirt and the rubbish, dead dogs, cats and even horses are left lying on the streets and in the yards. . . . The rain has washed some of it away, but that's no solution of the problem. . . ."

Katya interrupted him.

"Does the bath work?"

"No idea. At one time there was a plumber living here. . . . On Sundays he used to mess about in the kitchen and bathroom—purely on his own initiative—but then he left for the front. . . ."

"Go now!" said Katya firmly. "I'll try and get the room into something like order, and have a wash, and then I'll come to you. In the first place there are some addresses I've got to find. . . . I don't know a thing about Moscow. . . . You'll help me, won't you?"

"Oh, yes. It's Sunday, I shall be home all day."

He moved slowly away from the doorjamb and went away. Katya turned the key in the door after him. The thing was to work oneself up into a temper—then everything went like a house on fire. She took off her blouse and skirt to keep them clean, and embarked upon her campaign against the dust. There were any amount of rags stuffed in the various boxes. Rummaging about, Katya found sheets marked with her own initials, and then her own chemises and knickers and a few pairs of darned stockings. Marya Kondratyevna was a jewel—she had preserved invaluable things! True she had been a thievish, grasping old thing . . . but never mind . . . may the earth rest lightly on her bones. . . .

That same evening Maslov showed Katya his manuscripts and even read to her from some of them—historical research on the classics of Utopian socialism. He said to Katya, who was sitting on the edge of his unmade bed:

"I suppose you think it rather strange to be studying the Utopists at such a time. Utopia—during a proletarian dictatorship! Where's the internal logic? Admit you are surprised!"

Katya, who could hardly keep her eyes open, nodded in confirmation of the fact that she was surprised.

"And yet there *is* logic in it. . . . I dwell in detail on the attempts of isolated individuals and small groups in the mid-nineteenth century to put Utopian theories into practice. It is one of the most curious pages in the history of the social movement. . . ."

He turned aside, to conceal from Katya the involuntary smile which exposed his small teeth.

"But I can only write on Sundays. I work in the district committee, and there are very few of us: there are hardly any Party members left in Moscow. . . . I was only exempted from mobilization to the front owing to my excessively enfeebled condition. . . . I am physically and morally exhausted. . . ."

For all his delicate health—and he seemed to be nothing but skin and bone—Maslov showed himself extremely practical. The next day he accompanied Katya to the People's Commissariat for Education, introduced her to the right people, and helped her to register and get ration cards.

But for him, Katya would have been hopelessly lost in the huge commissariat, with its innumerable sections, offices, and heads of departments, especially since the spirit of restlessness and the dislike of routine sent the employees at least once a week careering wildly from place to place, from floor to floor with their tables, cupboards and files, changing the entire system of subordination, communications and responsibilities.

Katya was immediately appointed as a teacher in a primary school in the Presnya district. Then she was sent to another desk to be mobilized for social work in evening classes for the liquidation of illiteracy. At yet another desk she was taken in hand by an incredibly thin, olive-skinned individual, with huge feverish eyes, who led her through corridors and up stairs to the department for art propaganda. There she had lectures at factories assigned to her.

"We will settle the contents of the lectures later," said the olive-skinned man. "You will receive appropriate reading matter and a schedule. There is no need to fall into a panic—you're a person of culture and that's enough. It is our tragedy

that we don't have enough cultured people—over half of the intellectuals are sabotaging. They will rue it bitterly. The other half has been swallowed up by the front. Your coming to us has created an extremely favourable impression. . . .”

And finally a stout, very fussy man with a big mouth, wearing a pleated jacket of unbleached linen, going green under the armpits, ran into Katya.

“Are you an actress?” he asked hurriedly. “You have only just been pointed out to me,” and disregarding Katya’s statement that she was a teacher, he threw an arm over her shoulders and led her along the corridor. “I’ll get you into a troupe of entertainers and you’ll go to the front in a separate compartment; on leaving Moscow you will receive as much bread as you want, sugar and the best butter. . . . Never mind the repertoire! With your figure you can sing and dance, and the Red Army men will applaud you. . . . I sent Professor Chebutikin to the front, he’s sixty years old, and a chemist or an astronomer, or something of that sort. Well, they call him the king of the troupers—he sings couplets by Béranger. . . . You needn’t thank me, I’m a pure enthusiast. . . .”

“Listen!” cried Katya, breaking loose from him. “I have a school, lectures, and a literacy circle . . . it would be physically impossible. . . .”

“What do you mean—physically impossible? Do I only do what is physically possible? Chaliapin said it was a physical impossibility, too, but I got him a crate of brandy and he asked to be sent to the front himself. . . . All right—think it over. I’ll find you. . . .”

Katya returned home, weighed down by responsibility. A hot wind blowing from the dusty side streets raised eddies of dust on the cobble-stoned road. She turned into Tverskoi Boulevard, calculating—would she have enough time if she slept six hours? Eighteen hours . . . not enough! Lessons, correcting exercise books, preparing for next day’s lessons. . . . Literacy circle—all of two hours . . . and then, for goodness’ sake, the journeying to and fro! And giving lectures, including getting there and back? And they too would have to be prepared . . . eighteen hours would not be enough!

Katya sat down, perhaps on that very bench where she and Dasha had met Bessonov, in the year 1916, he dragging his feet, dusty. . . . Fantastic! Two women, fit for nothing whatever, and not knowing what to do with themselves, had gone

into agonies when Bessonov, who might have stepped out of a poem by Blok—"How hard it is for the dead to move among the living, feigning life and passion") had bowed to them as he passed slowly by, they following him with their eyes and finding his sloppy, semimilitary trousers heart-rending. . . .

She would have to do with four hours' sleep and have her sleep out on Sundays. And then there were the food queues! Katya shut her eyes and groaned. . . The wind fluttered the curls on her slender neck, and made its way into the old lime tree above her head, making the leaves rustle harshly. . . . And the noise of the leaves lulled Katya into forgetfulness of the problem: how to get more than twenty-four hours out of a day and night. It would all work out somehow. . . . She fell to musing on the astonishing change in herself, which was the object of her unceasing wonder and delight. A calm and confident expectation of some new happiness had begun to develop in her since the moment when, her head pressed against the stove, staring into Alexei's distorted face, she had said: "No!" She had had her first taste of this happiness in the spring: every night before going to sleep she had passed in review the day which had gone—and had found nothing dark or stifling in it. She had begun to like herself. And even now, was she not just playing at horror and despair over the impossibility of coping with all this work, when what really mattered was that the pitiable, bedraggled kitten she had only lately been, had suddenly become an important person. Katya, it appeared, was actually needed; the authoritative comrade, the one with the olive complexion and fine eyes, had spoken very respectfully to her. . . . She must justify all this. . . . It would be simply terrible if they were to say in the Commissariat for Education: "We relied on her, and she let us down. . . ." Here in Moscow life meant something other than merely bobbing up and down over the steppe behind Alexei's three horses, and nibbling at a straw, asking herself: "Of what use is thy beauty, captive maid?"

Maslov demanded a detailed report from Katya. When she told him the gist of her conversation with the olive-skinned comrade, the whole of Maslov's right cheek was converted into a mass of wrinkles by his wry smile.

"Oh, yes," he said, averting his face from Katya. "But the tragedy of the intellectuals is the least of it . . . there is something a great deal more tragic."

Katya opened school on the first of August. Little barefoot girls, their pigtails tied with rags or bits of string, and small crop-headed boys in torn shirts, came in very quietly, and as quietly took their seats at the desks. Many of them were so emaciated that their faces looked old and almost transparent.

Katya spent the whole of the first day getting to know the children, sitting beside them at their desks, questioning them and encouraging them to talk. She already had a little experience of how to set about winning children's interest. She opened a book before them: "Here's a book—the pages are white, the letters are black, and the lines seem grey. You can look at it all day long, and you won't find anything else in it. But if you learn to read and write, and have learned some history and geography and arithmetic and a lot of other things, this book will suddenly come alive for you. . . ."

She remembered how curiosity had suddenly blazed up in the eyes of the boys and girls in the village school at Vladimirskoye, and how they had enjoyed it when she talked to them about Pushkin's fairy tale *The Tsar Saltan*.

"First you learn the letters—*a, b, c*, then you write them on the board, then you begin reading words and then—aloud, of course—you read all the words from beginning to end. . . . And suddenly, one fine day, the lines begin to disappear and instead of lines of words you see the blue ocean and even hear the waves dashing against the shore, and then forty bogatyrs in steel armour and helmets come out of the sea foam, dripping wet and jolly, and with them the bearded Chernomor. . . ."

When she tried to tell them all this, at the Presnya school, she felt that her words did not enter the children's ears, but died out in the classroom, where half the windowpanes were boarded up with plywood, and the stucco on the walls had peeled off right to the bricks. The little girls, whose hands were so thin that they could have been passed through a napkin ring, and the little boys, their faces covered with wrinkles and sores, listened quietly, but she could see in their faces nothing but polite indulgence. . . . They were all thinking of something else.

In the long break the children went out into the yard, but only a few of the girls languidly pushed a stone about with the toe of one foot, while a couple of boys worked up a sulky quarrel. Most of them seated themselves in the shade of the

fence, at the foot of which grew dock leaves, and went on sitting there—none of them had brought anything to eat. They were all the children of workers living in the district, and the fathers of many of them were at the front.

One of the boys, squatting with his hands on the ground, was looking up at the clouds hanging over the street like smoke. Katya sat down beside him and asked him in brisk tones:

"You're Mitya Petrov, aren't you?"

"M'h'm."

"Where does your Dad work?"

"Papa's been at the war ever so long."

"And what does your mother do?"

"My mother stays at home, she's ill."

"Does your Dad write home?"

"No."

"Why doesn't he write?"

"What is there to write about? When he went away he said to Mother: I'll kill ten generals in revenge for your wearing yourself out with toil. . . . My Dad's awfully brave. . . ."

"What are you going to be when you grow up?"

"Don't know. Mother says we shan't live through this winter. . . ."

The White hordes were approaching Moscow, but autumn was approaching still more rapidly. There were a few days of Indian summer, gold-coloured and wistful, and then the wind set in stubbornly from the north, driving the clouds before it in serried masses.

There was nothing to heat the iron stove in the school with. Katya went to the Commissariat for Education to complain to the olive-skinned comrade, who merely bowed his head, never taking his eyes off Katya's winsome face: "I understand your anxiety, Ekaterina Dmitrevna, and appreciate the warmth of your interest, but things will be very bad with fuel this winter—the Commissariat for Education has been promised wood, but it's in the Vologda province, and has to be sent here on carts. Try and stir people up, bring pressure to bear wherever you can. . . ."

The children arrived at school so blue with cold, so wet, so poorly clad (in thin, wretched little coats, or old jackets

of their mothers', only fit for a scarecrow) that at last Katya made up her mind to go in for frank banditism, and appointed a *subbotnik** for requisitioning the fence. The yardman of the school, a deaf old man with a wooden leg, Katya, and the children—who turned up almost in a body—broke up the fence one dark evening, to the noise of a raging wind, and carried all the railings into the porch. The yardman sawed them, and the next day it was warm and damp in the classroom, the moist walls steamed, and the children perked up, while Katya told them from the teacher's desk all about solar energy (of which she had only learned the day before from a useful book entitled *The Forces of Nature*).

"Everything you see, children—the teacher's desk, the forms you are sitting on, the fire in the stove, and you yourselves, come from solar energy. . . . To get control over it is the task of humanity. That is why we have to learn and struggle. . . . And now we'll have a lesson in the Russian language. . . . The Russian language is solar energy, too, and so we must study it well. . . ."

During the break the children would tell Katya all sorts of news. . . . They knew all that was going on in the district, in Moscow, and even among the lords in foreign parts.

Katya learned a great deal from their stories. Thus she learned before it was in the papers, of the White breakthrough at Orel, from where wounded were arriving. Two little girls had heard with their own ears how at the Mikulins—where they had run round on purpose to get news—Stepan Mikulin, a turner, only just back, all shot to bits, poor man, had sat up in bed, though the doctors strictly ordered him to stay lying down, and shouted to his wife and mother in an awful voice:

"There's treachery among us at the front—treachery! Give me pen and paper. I'll write to Vladimir Ilyich! The best proletarians are shedding their blood and dying at the front, because they can't bear Moscow to be surrendered to the White general. . . . It wasn't our fault Orel was surrendered—it was treachery!"

Mitya Petrov went white as a sheet as he listened to the girls' stories; his eyes grew wider and wider, and there was such suffering in them that Katya sat next to him at his desk

* Voluntary work, out of hours.

and pressed his head to her bosom, but he silently freed himself—no consolations, no caresses were any good to him just now.

For several days the rain came down in torrents, Presnya was almost knee-deep in slushy, dun-coloured mud, and the children came to school quite ravaged with the terrible rumours spreading like a pest through the town. It was difficult to make them concentrate on their lessons. Red-haired little Klavdia, who had not done her addition and subtraction, burst out into loud sobs during the lesson. Katya knocked her pencil on the teacher's desk:

"Pull yourself together this moment, Klavdia."

"I can't, Auntie K-K-Katya."

"What's the matter?"

The reply came in a hoarse voice:

"Mama says what's the good of your learning arithmetic, Klavdia, you'll never. . . ."

"Nonsense—your mother never said that."

"She said: you came from dirt and you'll go back to dirt. . . . The officers will trample us all under their horses' feet. . . ."

Katya went to her literacy circle in the dusk, walking close to the fences to keep her feet as dry as possible, and stopping in despair at the corners, wondering how she was ever going to get across the road. Not a single one of the women she was teaching came that evening to the room of the worker Chesnokov (recently sent to the front as a commissar). His wife, only six months married, and pregnant, appallingly thin, with yellowish blotches on her face, said to Katya:

"Don't come here for a bit. Wait a bit, we have other things to think about. . . . And it would be better for you, too."

She showed Katya a letter from her husband at the front: "If Tula is taken, Lyuba, be prepared. We won't give up Moscow, we'll fight to the last man. . . . I write in great haste through someone going to Moscow. . . . Roshchin, a comrade-in-arms, may visit you. You can trust him. He'll tell you everything, it would be a good thing if our comrades could hear what he has to say . . . and see that they help him, if he needs it. I remain alive and well, I have learned to ride, a thing I never dreamed of. . . ."

"We're waiting for that Comrade Roshchin, but he hasn't come," said Chesnokov's wife, gazing disconsolately through the wet windowpane. "When he does, you can come and hear

him. I'll send a little girl for you. . . . Who is he, this Roshchin—could it be your husband?"

"No," replied Katya. "My husband was killed long ago."

When she got home she heated the small iron stove, with the pipe which went through an opening in the windowpane; these stoves were nicknamed the "bumblebee" for the way they buzzed when they were heated with long splinters of wood. Katya's had been made by the workers of the Presnya district, who set it up in her room themselves, considering that their teacher would work more productively if the room she spent the night in was warmed just a little. Katya removed her soaking boots and stockings and mud-spattered skirt, washed her feet in icy water, put on dry clothes, filled the kettle and placed it on the "bumblebee," then drew a piece of grey bread, prickly with chaff, from the pocket of her coat, and laid it on a clean napkin, beside a cup and a silver teaspoon. All this she did with an air of abstraction. When the kitchen door banged and the intolerably slow footsteps of Maslov trailed along the passage, she went and knocked at his door.

Ah! Ekaterina Dmitrevna! Good day! Take a seat. Beastly weather. . . . Why, you're getting prettier every day. You are, you know. . . ."

For some reason he was particularly irascible this evening. When Katya asked him what was going on, and why there was such alarm everywhere, he stretched his thin lips in one of his most poisonous smiles, without even taking the trouble to avert his face, as he usually did.

"Is it Party news, or something else which interests you? The war? Our side is being beaten. What else can I tell you? Beaten! And as usual a spirit of cheerful optimism prevails in Moscow. . . . Mass mobilization of Communists against Denikin. . . . In Petrograd, mass raids in bourgeois districts. . . . A decision has been passed to close all plants and factories owing to lack of fuel. . . . The last and finally cheering news is that the re-registering of Party tickets has been announced, that is to say a cleansing of the Augean stables has begun. . . . And that's how we think to conquer Denikin and Yudenich, and Kolchak. . . ."

He dragged his feet over the floor, which was littered with cigarette ends; the tapes round the ankles of his long underwear had come undone and were trailing from under the

cuffs of his damp and dirty trousers.... He snapped his fingers as he walked up and down, but was too weak to make the proper clicking sound.

"Yes, we'll conquer them, we'll conquer them," he repeated in mocking accents. "Of course all this is incomprehensible to you ... and small wonder that it is.... What is a great deal more surprising is that it's incomprehensible to me, too.... I don't understand a thing.... Socialism is built up on the basis of material culture ... Socialism is the highest form of labour productivity.... Very well, then. Is a high standard of industrial development essential? It is. Is a highly developed and numerous working class essential? Of course it is! We've read Karl Marx, we've read his works thoroughly. So now let's occupy ourselves with re-registration. There's life in the old dog yet!"

And Katya got no satisfaction from him. In the Commissariat for Education, where she went the next day for instructions, there was a piercing draught in the main corridor, which was unusual (a window must have been broken, or left open deliberately). Despite this, there were whispering groups of employees everywhere. Katya went in vain from room to room, till at last a woman clerk, her nose muffled in a rubbed skunk collar, said:

"Aren't you awake, yet, citizeness? Don't you know we're probably being evacuated to Vologda?"

And then, just as suddenly, there was a complete right-about-face. As Katya was hastening off to school at daybreak the next morning, she had to stop and wait at the corner of Sadovaya Street. Armed detachments of workers were passing by over the stiffening mud, breaking the layer of ice on the pools beneath the huge naked lime trees through which the wind was already howling with a wintry sound. After them came a train of carts. And then again, in serried ranks, came fresh columns, marching slowly, as if under a spell. Here and there harsh, unmelodious voices intoned the *Internationale*. The words: "All to the Struggle against Denikin's White Bands!", "Long Live the Proletarian Revolution Throughout the World!", "Death to the World Bourgeoisie!" were hastily daubed in crooked letters on the strips of red bunting which they held aloft. Ever new columns emerged from the bleak morning mist, and passed on. Katya looked at their faces—unshaven, lean, emaciated, darkened—and thought

to herself that they all had the same expression in their eyes and in their firmly compressed lips: an expression denoting suppressed suffering, resolution, inexorable will. . . .

As soon as she got to the school the children told her the news: Lenin had been in the Presnya district yesterday, at the Mechanical Works, and a Party Week had begun. . . .

Shkuro's Kuban Corps joined forces with Mamontov not far from Voronezh. He had six cavalry divisions now, against Budyonny's two. He called a halt and waited for Budyonny. Mamontov was cautious. He assigned some of his forces for the reinforcing of the defence of Voronezh; the two corps were reorganized into three columns, and a place selected for the battle in which the Red cavalry was to be surrounded and annihilated—a vast field ending at the railway track, up and down which an armoured train was cruising, like a steel tortoise bearing six-inch guns.

Budyonny was bold but wary. He had received detailed information about all the preparations and machinations of General Momontov. . . . Some little girl with a hastily scribbled note hidden under her shawl or her kerchief, or some poor old woman bearing a basket for scraps, passed through the White outposts—few would be tempted by a lousy brat, and any Cossack would turn in disgust from an old woman—and these would contact Budoyunny's scouts and pass on information.

Budyonny halted between the forest and the swamps, stopping short of the vast field marked out for his ruin. He gave orders for the horses to be given their fill and have their hoofs examined (they were only shod on the forefeet). He gave orders for ammunition to be replenished and for the men to be given, instead of ground millet—and weren't they sick of millet gruel!—salt meat and beans seized from the enemy, sweetened condensed milk, and some sugary biscuits and fragrant tobacco to cheer them up around the campfires. All this had been obtained from the "mobile arsenal," as the rich baggage trains of the Whites were dubbed. These were now trailing by, day and night, on their way from Voronezh to Mamontov. Semyon Mikhailovich was particularly anxious to get hold of new Japanese carbines, and substitute them,

as far as possible, for the battle-worn rifles of his corps; another object was office supplies.

By taking cover in forests and swamps the men were able to sleep in peace before the serious operation awaiting them. But this operation—to engage in hand-to-hand fighting with six Don divisions—was such a very grave prospect, that not many seemed inclined for peaceful sleep. They groomed their horses till a clean handkerchief could have been passed over their coats and brought away unsoiled, they polished their saddles, and ground their swords. There was neither singing nor accordion-playing to be heard in the whole squadron, but profound discussions were going on everywhere. Catching sight of the Commissar they would wave to him: "Come here, Communist. . . . Tell us this, Comrade—aren't we going to take Voronezh, after we've polished off Mamontov? They've got a lot of stuff there, you know." The Commissar replied that Semyon Mikhailovich had not yet given any orders regarding Voronezh. Then arguments arose: could cavalry take a fortified zone? Some considered it would be possible, given tremendous enthusiasm, others, that it was contrary to all rules.

Telegin's squadron, which was appointed for guard duty, was posted on the edge of the swamp. South of it was a field on which the figures of White scouts loomed now and then. One of the three Mamontov columns was known to be grouped on it, and at night the clouds were shot with faint reflections from their campfires.

In Telegin's squadron, too, the coming battle, for which such vast and powerful masses of cavalry had assembled, was the subject of general discussion. Gorbushin, a veteran cavalryman, gave his reminiscences of a battle that had taken place at Brodi: an Austrian cavalry division of four regiments had made a spirited attack on our light cavalry division, which ended in the Austrians withdrawing the remnants of their cavalry to the rear. . . . They had attacked from above, halfway down the side of a hill, thinking to hurl our troops into the valley below. But our troops rushed up to meet them on the hillside. We had four squadrons of Cossack lancers on each flank, with Uhlans in the centre, also bearing lances, and Akhtir hussars—dashing chaps with yellow cap bands and yellow piping on their uniforms.

Our side knew the Austrians would not be able to turn their horses on the slope at such a speed. When the Austrians

got nearer they tried to rein in their horses, not having expected such a furious attack—but it was too late. Our men thrust their lances into the enemy from below—neat work it was! We just stuck a lance into an Austrian and let go of it and galloped on through their ranks, turning round to slash at him,—not from the shoulder, mind you, but crossways, so as to strike him through the body, they had steel plates under their shoulder straps.... And the four regiments of the Guards were left strewn halfway down the hill, cut to pieces, pinned to the ground with lances—and a ghastly sight it was!

Latugin, who was not particularly fond of letting others gain general attention with exciting stories, interrupted the veteran warrior.

"We know all that—and what about it, anyway! It's all pure chance. Why not tell us how three Red Army men captured a German battalion? Don't you know that? Aha! That's just what you ought to know...."

"Come on, Latugin—tell us!" came in several voices.

Latugin was kneeling in front of the fire, close to the embers, which lit up his haggard face, reduced by weeks in the saddle to skin and bone. From the very start Telegin had taken him, Gagin, and Zaduviter into the commandant's battalion, where, in the course of two months, they had filled out a little, and now they were members of the cavalry squadron.

"There was a man in the Tenth—Lenka Shchoor, his name was—and you might search the world before you could find another such fire-eater," began Latugin, folding his hands over the hilt of his sword, the tip of which was dug into the earth. "Last autumn, while he was still in a Ukrainian brigade, he went scouting with two comrades. They were riding on, all unsuspecting, when they suddenly came on Germans—a whole battalion of them. They had posted themselves in this lonely spot, and were making soup...."

"That can't be true," objected one of his hearers. "The Germans never make soup in lonely spots."

Latugin cast a withering look at the interrupter.

"Must I explain to you why they were making soup? Very well.... The Germans were on their way home, it was after the revolution had broken out in their own country.... All the neighbouring Ukrainian villages had risen, posting

machine guns all over the place; there was nowhere for the Germans to go, and they were hungry. . . . Now d'you understand? Before the Germans had time to prepare for combat, Lenka took a clean strip of linen legging from his pouch, stuck it on his sword blade, and went boldly up to them. 'Surrender,' he said, 'you are surrounded by a huge cavalry force, we shan't even stain our swords with blood, we'll just trample you underfoot with our horses. . . .' An interpreter was found, and he translated these words. The commander of the battalion, an N.C.O., a sturdy German, replied to Lenka: 'I doubt if what you say is true.' And Lenka replied to him: 'You are right to doubt, get on to your horse and ride to our headquarters—fair conditions will be offered you there. . . .' The Germans held an earnest consultation, and the commander said: 'Gut Morgen. All right—we'll ride with you three to one in case you are up to any tricks . . . and if you try to put something over, we'll do you in on the way.' 'That's all right!' said Lenka. 'Only there won't be any tricks, you are dealing with fighters of the revolution. . . .' So they went. They arrived at headquarters. Negotiations began at once. The Germans demanded to be allowed to go to the railway, and asked for twenty-five poods of millet. And our side demanded that the Germans hand over their arms and two guns. The Germans held out and we held out. And all the time Lenka hung about, and at last he said: 'Comrade Brigade Commander, they're hungry—that's why they're so obstinate. I'll talk them round, and you order some good pork fat and wheat bread to be issued to them.' He didn't say anything officially about drink, the cunning devil, but the supply manager was his good friend, and he wangled a quart from him. Then he sat down in the hut with the Germans, sliced the fat and the bread, poured some vodka into a mug, and began talking about one thing and another—about how well off our people in the Ukraine were for food and drink, and what nice people they were, on the whole. He praised the Germans, too, for having overthrown the Kaiser. And though this time there was no interpreter, the Germans understood everything—Lenka thumped them in a friendly way on the back, and took them by the ears and kissed them. Very soon there were only two left in their seats—Lenka and the German commander, the N.C.O. Lenka worked hard, but the German only laughed and wagged his finger at him. . . . Somebody

came from the Chief of Staff to find out how things were going. 'None too well,' Lenka told them, 'the commander isn't responding to propaganda, we must have another quart. . . .' And when the second quart was finished, only Lenka was left in his seat. The Germans stayed the night. In the morning the N.C.O. left his comrades as hostages—they couldn't have got on to their horses after all that drinking, anyhow—and rode off with Lenka. And in the evening he brought the whole battalion back with him—four hundred men—under a red flag. Lenka's propaganda had won him over. . . ."

When Latugin had finished his story, which was infinitely better than Gorbushin's account of the battle at Brodi, and the men had had their laugh out—some whinnying, showing all their teeth, some wiping their eyes, some groaning helplessly and waving a hand, Roshchin came up to the fire and bent over Latugin.

"Find Gagin and Zaduiviter, and come to the tent with them," he said.

In the white morning mist which lay low over the plain, five riders rode by at a gallop—Roshchin, bent almost double over the neck of a sorrel mare with a clipped mane, Dundich, the little Serb in command of one of Budyonny's squadrons, half a length in front on a black stallion, and behind them, urging on their horses, Latugin, Gagin, and Zaduiviter. Roshchin and Dundich wore light-coloured officers' greatcoats with gilt shoulder straps, the other three, cockaded caps and sheepskin jackets with sergeants' shoulder straps.

In his undeviating progress through life, Dundich had found a second native land. He had fallen in love with the boundless land of Russia and its boundless revolution with the passion of a nature which was simple, enthusiastic and utterly intrepid.

The task allotted to them was to get into Voronezh, see how the artillery was posted, discover the strength of cavalry and infantry forces, and, finally, hand over to General Shkuro, in command of the defence, a sealed envelope containing a letter from Budyonny.

Dundich loved life, and loved gambling with his life, and just now, in these October days when the muscles went taut

beneath his tunic, and every inhalation of the crisp air in the morning mist brought with it a whole gamut of odours, he found idleness especially irksome. He had volunteered to hand the sealed dispatch over to Shkuro himself. He had sought out Roshchin, and said to him:

"Vadim Petrovich, you're just the man wanted for a certain little adventure. You know the ways of officers, and all their little mannerisms. Would you consent to dash over to Voronezh with me? It'll take one day, and it'll be a splendid ride. Budyonny promises us his own horses, Petushok and Aurora. . . ."

It was absurd to talk about consenting or not consenting, although the mention of officers' "mannerisms" grated unpleasantly on Roshchin's ears. But in fact he had to spend a whole evening teaching his comrades how the lower ranks deported themselves, how to salute and answer questions, and what Volunteer officers ought to look like, whether Drozdovsky's men, with their ironical faces and fondness for wearing pince-nez, in honour of their late chief, or Kornilov's followers, with their traditional dull stare and expression of contemptuous disillusionment, or the Markovites, who made a point of wearing filthy greatcoats and using still filthier language.

It was settled that, in case of their being stopped and questioned, they were to say: "We are carrying a secret dispatch to Voronezh from the commander of a Volunteer reserve regiment arrived in Kastornaya from the South." This would be both vague and convincing.

After about three hours of fast riding in the pale light flashing out every now and then from beneath the leaden clouds, they came in sight of Voronezh—domes, lookout towers, reddish roofs. They had not been molested by a single reconnoitring party the whole way—the patrols simply trained their field glasses on the five horsemen galloping in the direction of the town, and rode on at a walk. The first delay had occurred at the hastily knocked-together wooden bridge. It was guarded and several imposing persons in peakless caps and white sheepskin coats like those worn by Ukrainian peasant women, were strolling up and down it. They all had spreading beards. At the other end was a group of cadets standing beside the bridgehead trenches and smoking.

Dundich reined in his horse, leaped from the saddle and began tightening the girths.

"It would be desirable not to show faked passes here," he said, under his breath. "But the river's up, and it would be still less desirable to get wet to the neck fording it somewhere else. We shall have to ride over the bridge."

"All right, we'll swear our way across somehow," said Latugin.

Here Zaduviter said, almost choking with laughter:

"Strike me blind, mates, if those aren't priests on the bridge—the long-haired brigade."

"At the walk, forward—and look cheerful," said Dundich, leaping into the saddle like a cat.

The bearded men on the bridge began calling out discordantly: "Halt! Halt!" Dundich rode straight at them, holding the reins tight and tickling Petushok with the spurs. But they raised such a din, and waved their rifles so violently that his horse began tucking in its hindquarters and lashing its tail angrily, and he had to stop. Several hands came out to seize the bridle. Urging his horse forward, Latugin shouted:

"You must be mad! How dare you touch His Honour's bridle? Who are you, anyhow? Show your papers!"

"Silence! Rein in your horse!" said Dundich, addressing Latugin calmly over his shoulder. Then he bent from the saddle to the bearded men, his white teeth showing from beneath the bristling moustache.

"Is a pass needed to go over this bridge? I haven't got one. I'm Colonel Dundich and this is my escort. . . . Are you satisfied? Thank you. . . ."

And laughing, he sent Petushok forward with such impetus that the horse snorted and reared, showing his velvety-grey belly, and dashed past the bearded men, who hardly had time to leap aside. But Dundich quieted the steed instantly, and proceeded at a walk. By now the alarm had been raised on the other side. The cadets flung away their cigarettes, and rushed stumbling over the hems of their long greatcoats, to the clayey trenches, from which the muzzles of two machine guns were trained on the horsemen. The commander of the bridgehead fortifications, a tall officer with a languid, moustached countenance, drawled out in an insolent voice, so familiar that Roshchin set his jaw in disgust:

"Hi, you there on the bridge, dismount and prepare your passes. . . . At the count of two I shall open fire. . . ."

Dundich spoke to Roshchin out of the corner of his mouth:

"Can't be helped, we shall have to attack."

His hand went towards his sword. Roshchin stopped him with a quick movement.

"Teplov!" he called out to the tall officer. "Leave your machine guns alone! It's me—Vadim Roshchin. . . ."

And he got off his horse with unhurried movements, and led it over the bridge by the bridle. The officer was that same Vaska Teplov, Roshchin's onetime comrade-in-arms, the drunken, boastful fool whom Roshchin had once seriously threatened to give a punch in the face for slanderous and filthy insinuations. Slowly returning his revolver to the holster, Teplov regarded Roshchin's approaching figure suspiciously.

"Don't you know me? . . . have you been on a bend, or what? Morning, morning, old chap!" Roshchin gave him his hand without removing the glove. "What are *you* doing here? What's the idea of scraping together a brigade of fat-bellied beavers, you ass? It's time you were in command of a regiment. . . . Demoted again—what? For being drunk, of course!"

"Good Lord, it's Vadim Roshchin!" lisped Teplov,—there was a black hole beneath his moustache where the front teeth should have been. The purple bags under his eyes quivered. "Where have you come from? We thought you had deserted. . . ."

"Much obliged!" said Roshchin with a hard, hot look right into Teplov's eyes, a look which made Teplov decide to say no more about desertion. "You seem to have a high opinion of me. . . . I was at Grishin-Almazov's in Odessa all the time. . . . And now I'm chief of staff of the fifty-first reserve regiment. Perhaps you'd really like to see my papers though?" he added defiantly, turning and calling out: "Come here, Dundich, you needn't dismount. . . ."

Teplov merely sniffed angrily, he had always been afraid of Roshchin.

"Nonsense! . . . That's a funny way to talk to me, Roshchin. . . . Where are you going?"

"To General Shkuro. We've brought a regiment to help you out. I hear Budyonny has given you a good fright. . . ."

"Yes, this is such a mucking hole. . . . The whole civilian

population has been mobilized—a lot of retired generals and beastly civil servants . . . they put the priests into uniform and sent them to me. . . .”

Roshchin took out his cigarette case, which contained foreign cigarettes seized from one of the carts from enemy headquarters the day before. Teplov lit up, sending out a fragrant stream of smoke over his moustache.

“Fancy!” he said in astonishment. “Real foreign cigarettes. Where did you get them? We get nothing but shag . . . it gives you the most infernal heartburn. Do give me a couple more, just to keep.”

“How are things in general, Vaska?”

“Beastly. . . no money. . . . I’m fed up with everything.”

He peered from beneath his eyebrows at Dundich, leaping out of the saddle, and the three morose cavalrymen behind him. “If you are counting on having a good time in Voronezh, gentlemen, you’re in for a disappointment. . . . The Red swine have cleaned up everything—not a café or a bawdyhouse left, simply nowhere to rest. . . .”

“Let me introduce Colonel Dundich,” said Roshchin.

“Captain Teplov.”

The two men saluted. Dundich, his dusky face with the darting eyes wrinkled up in laughter, said:

“What a pity! And we were hoping for a good time . . . we’ve come provided with the needful. . . .”

“Well, of course there are girls to be found in private houses, and you can get prewar vodka, the black-marketers even have champagne hidden away . . . five hundred rubles a bottle! It’s a disgrace!”

Teplov’s continually watering eyes expressed indignation from beneath the puffy lids. “The military authorities treat these profiteers as if they were sort of saints. . . . Saviours of the fatherland! We had a bit of a carouse in Tambov, you see . . . well, of course the bill was preposterous, and of course we had nothing to pay with, so I let out in the man’s face and got away, and for that I was demoted. . . . That sort of thing has lowered the morale of our units, Vadim. Hang it all, aren’t we giving our lives? Our youth is passing. . . . And what is there ahead of us? Moscow devastated . . . utter penury. . . . It’s all very well for you, you’ve been to the university, when you take off your lousy uniform you can give lectures or something. . . . I shall have to go on with the

same old dreary round—and we shan't even be allowed to have a proper army. . . .”

“You need a change, Captain,” said Dundich. “Come to the town with us. We only have to deliver the dispatch to the commander, and then the whole night is before us. . . . I'll stand the champagne. . . .”

“Damn it all!” said Teplov, his hand flying up to scratch himself behind the ear. “I can't just leave my post all of a sudden. . . .”

“Hand over the command to the senior N.C.O. in the platoon,” suggested Roshchin. “You can tell the commandant that you half suspect us of being Red patrols in disguise. They can't do more than curse you for a fool. . . .”

Teplov opened his toothless mouth and laughed, wiping his eyes.

“That's an idea! Why I even wanted to arrest you. . . .”

“So you did.”

“Sergeant Gvozdev!” shouted Teplov, and his voice now had a cheerful ring; he turned towards the trench, where the cadets had fallen back into their trance of boredom at the machine gun. And when the sergeant, a lad of eighteen with insolent blue eyes, came up, saluting smartly, his elbow on a level with his shoulder, Teplov handed the command over to him and ordered his horse to be brought round.

On the way to town, fidgeting in his saddle in his impatience, Teplov gave all the information required: the number of military units in Voronezh, the amount of artillery, and where they were posted. . . .

“It's sheer animal panic, that's all. . . . Kutevov, forsooth, has a misfortune at Orel, and our lot shit in their pants. . . . It usen't to be like that. . . . Remember the Frost Campaign, Vadim? The only thing you hear now is: ‘We have lost heart.’ Yes, yes, something has gone—the former ardour. . . . And the muzhiks here are swine—we get nothing but dirty looks from them. . . . General Kutevov was right a thousand times when he barked out to the Commander in Chief: ‘Moscow can be taken on one condition: that we give the population land reform and gallows. . . .’ Not a single telegraph post must be left unoccupied . . . whole villages must be hung at a time, as in the days of Pugachev . . . but all that's a bloody bore. . . .

Somebody gave me the address of two sisters, highly obliging girls, they can play the guitar and sing drawing-room ballads—enough to drive you crazy! Listen—suppose we go straight there!”

Teplov seemed to be very well known, and the few patrols they met merely saluted, without so much as glancing at Dundich and Roshchin. They turned in at the iron portico of a hotel in the principal thoroughfare. Teplov dismounted, stretching his legs:

“I don’t want to be too conspicuous,” he said bashfully. “I’ll wait for you here. . . . Headquarters is on the second floor. . . . Don’t be long, gentlemen!”

He then said severely to the moustached and pock-marked Kuban Cossack standing in the entry: “Let them in, block-head!”

Dundich and Roshchin ascended the wrought-iron staircase. Budyonny’s dispatch was addressed: “Major General Shkuro, Private and Confidential.” It had been decided to deliver it through an adjutant. The office was housed in the restaurant, the bedraggled windows of which had broken panes. Just as Dundich and Roshchin went in, two men entered ahead of them by another door: the face of one of them, a tall, top-heavy fellow with luxuriant whiskers, was not without a certain crude handsomeness; he walked with the help of a crutch which rumpled the cloth under the sleeve of his light-grey general’s overcoat. Roshchin recognized Mamontov. The other, who wore a brown Circassian tunic, had an inflamed, brutal countenance, high cheekbones, and an upturned nose with wide nostrils—this was Shkuro. On entering the room they stopped before a table at which a youthful staff officer in extravagantly flared riding breeches was dictating to a pretty blonde, whose hands rose and fell over the keys of her Underwood.

Roshchin pointed out Shkuro to Dundich and asked: “What’s our next step?” Just then Mamontov turned, and, seeing two officers with unfamiliar faces, called to them in a deep voice:

“Come over here, gentlemen!”

Roshchin drew himself erect and remained at the door. Dundich went up to Shkuro.

“I have a dispatch to hand to Your Excellency.”

Shkuro, who was standing almost with his back to Dundich, did not turn round, merely stretching out his strong red neck, which the braided collar dug into, and, without looking at the face of his interlocutor, asked, his upper lip raised wolfishly:

"Who is the dispatch from?"

"From the commander of the fifty-first reserve, which has come to the right bank of the Don to place itself at your disposal. . . ."

"Fifty-first regiment—never heard of it," said Shkuro, as disagreeably as before, though he turned and took the envelope, revolving it in his hands. "Who's the commander?"

Vadim Petrovich, standing in the doorway, felt a shiver run down his spine and dropped his hand on to the butt of his revolver in the pocket of his greatcoat. Things had turned out all wrong, it was idiotic, all no good. . . . Dundich would blurt out some unknown name . . . and what a pity it was—valuable information could have been taken to Budyonny. . . .

"Count Chambertin is in command of the fifty-first regiment," replied Dundich without hesitation, his gay glance challenging Shkuro's somnolent, bilious squint. "May we go, Your Excellency?"

"Just a minute, Colonel!" It was Mamontov, turning clumsily on his crutch. "I seem to know that name, let's have a look!" A grimace of pain passed over his handsome fleshy face: the clumsy movement had caused the splint to rub against his leg, the bone in which had been shattered by a bullet the week before, when he was fleeing from Budyonny. . . . "The devil!" he muttered. "Oh, the devil! You may go, Colonel. . . ."

Dundich saluted, turned on his heel, and went to the door. Roshchin watched Shkuro tear the envelope slowly, saying something the while to Mamontov, whose face was still contorted with pain. The envelope contained a letter signed by Semyon Budyonny. Dundich and Roshchin were aware of its contents: "On October 24th, 6 a. m., I shall be in Voronezh. I order you, General Shkuro, to have all counter-revolutionary forces drawn up on the square in front of the crescent, where you hung the workers. I order you personally to review the parade. . . ."

They descended the iron staircase. Cadets armed with rifles were coming up in single file. It seemed to Roshchin that little Dundich in front of him, holding his head high and

jingling his spurs, was going too slow.... Unnecessary, foolish bravado!

A loud, hoarse cry came from the second floor.... Dundich and Roshchin emerged from the entry, where Teplov rushed up to them from the pavement, his flabby face with the drooping moustache suffused with the craving for champagne, drawing-room ballads, and girls....

"Thank the Lord, gentlemen.... Come on...."

Thrusting his foot into the stirrup he hopped beside his jibbing horse. Roshchin was already in the saddle. Dundich took out his cigarette case and lit up, his dry brown fingers trembling slightly. Then, flinging away the burning match, he took the bridle from Latugin and said harshly:

"First turning on the left, at a trot!"

The first turning on the left was only ten houses away; Latugin, Gagin, and Zaduviter, their horses' hoofs clicking over the cobblestones, were the first to turn into the side street. Reining in his horse and turning, Teplov yelled:

"It's the next turning on the right, gentlemen...."

But his horse carried him left with the rest. As Roshchin turned the corner he looked back and saw the cadets racing out of the hotel door, glancing round hastily and clicking the locks of their rifles.

"What the hell, Roshchin?" shouted Teplov, almost in tears, going into a gallop with the others. Dundich rode right up to his horse and bending down at the gallop took Teplov firmly by the wrist, broke the lanyard of his revolver, and dragged the revolver out of the holster.

"The champagne's on me!" he shouted, showing his teeth in a grin.

All five—Dundich, Roshchin, and the three others—were now tearing up the crooked street at full speed, past small houses and fences, their caps catching in the bare twigs of ancient lime trees. Shots rang out behind them. Without slackening speed they galloped over the plain, fell into a trot again near the bridge, and rode up to the bridgehead trenches at a walk. Dundich, patting the smoking neck of his horse, called out:

"Sergeant Gvozdev!"

When the latter, concealing his cigarette in his cuff, came up Dundich said: "Captain Teplov asked me to inform you that he will be back in half an hour. We shall be here again

on the morning of the 24th, so please don't frighten us with your machine guns any more. . . ."

"Very good, Sir!"

When, the bridge far behind them, they were giving the foam-flecked, stumbling horses a rest under cover of the dusk, Dundich said to Roshchin:

"I feel ashamed of myself before you and the other comrades. I've often had to upbraid myself for showing off. . . . Danger is intoxicating, sharpens the wits, makes a man in love with himself, so that the aim is forgotten, and all sense of responsibility is lost . . . and afterwards comes repentance . . . every time. . . . If my comrades were to get off their horses this minute, and drag me off mine by the leg and give me a sound drubbing, I would not be the least offended, it would even be a relief. . . ."

Roshchin threw back his head and laughed heartily—he, too, had felt the need of relaxation, after the prolonged strain he had undergone.

"You certainly do deserve a licking, Dundich—especially for the cigarette in the entry. . . ."

Budyonny's ruse had worked. Mamontov and Shkuro, after reading the letter, delivered with such incredible audacity into their very hands, were seized with indescribable rage. What confidence was required to have written like that, actually naming the day and hour of the taking of Voronezh! And Budyonny evidently had that confidence. The White generals completely lost their balance.

Budyonny's plan for the defeat of the White cavalry was based on a counterattack by all his own concentrated forces in succession against the three columns of the Don and Kuban divisions endeavouring to surround him. These had delayed their offensive, contenting themselves with reconnoitring. Now he was quite sure that they would rush headlong to the attack.

On the night of the 18th of October the Red patrols reported movement in the enemy's camp. The hour of the bloody battle had struck. Semyon Mikhailovich, seated over the map with his divisional chiefs, said: "Good luck!" and gave the order to all divisions, regiments and squadrons:

"To horse!"

Field telephones rang in dark huts, in the steppe, in dugouts, hidden beneath branches and hay, or simply in haycocks. Through the receivers the signalmen heard the news that everyone had been awaiting hourly. Orderlies, hurling themselves into the saddle, settling into their stirrups at the gallop, sped through the darkness. The soldiers, sleeping in their clothes that windless night, dark as an enemy's grave, awoke to a long-drawn yell: "To horse!", leaped to their feet, shaking off sleep, rushed to the horse lines, and hastily saddled their horses, tightening the girths so ruthlessly that the beasts staggered.

The squadrons assembled in the field, guided to their places in the dark by the shouted words of command rolling from line to line. They formed and waited long, watching the sky for the first signs of dawn. The horses were still breathing sleepily. The chill air penetrated the men's wadded jackets, sheepskin coats and thin army greatcoats. The men were silent, no one smoked.

And then, from afar, came the gurgling sound of the first shot. The voices of the commissars rang out: "Comrades, Semyon Mikhailovich Budyonny orders you to smash the enemy. . . . The bourgeois hirelings are striving to get to Moscow—kill them! Cover the revolutionary arms with glory!"

The dawn did not light up the fields, owing to the mist lying on the ground. With thundering hoofs, stirrup to stirrup, the eight Budyonny regiments tore by in deployment formation, several miles long. In the dense mist each rider could only see a comrade on the right, a comrade on the left, and just ahead the croups of horses bobbing up and down in the milky, dissolving haze.

The enemy was near, and coming ever nearer. Spasmodic firing could now be heard. Budyonny's men, urging on their horses, craned their necks for a glimpse of him. . . . At last a shout, growing ever louder, more furious, and fiercer, ran through the whole formation. The front lines had sighted the enemy.

From the mist emerged the shadowy forms of wheeling horsemen. The hearts of the Don Cossacks failed them. They too had rushed in thousands upon the foe. Surely it must have been the Evil One himself who had lured them so far from their native villages to clash swords with these Red devils!

They heard the earth hum and quake, and knew that a dread force was about to fall on them, crushing men and horses, whirling them round, piling them in a heap of mutilated bodies. . . . And what was it all for? The Cossacks, trusting to their mettlesome Don chargers, backed and turned. . . . All but a few daredevils, drunk with their own audacity, who rushed headlong into the Budyonny lines, laying about them with their swords.

The Don steeds could not save their riders. Those who had wheeled round ran up into others who were still forging ahead. . . . Comrades-in-arms threw one another. . . . Budyonny's men cut them down, trampled them beneath their horses' hoofs, put them to flight. . . . Wild shrieks rang out. . . . Everywhere, pairs of horsemen could be seen in the mist—one clinging to his horse's neck, the other in pursuit, leaning back in the saddle and brandishing his sword for the blow. . . . The maddened horses squealed and snapped. . . .

All the Cossack regiments had now turned tail. But their flight was cut off by machine-gun carts, driving a deep wedge into their flanks, and forcing them to one side, where fresh Budyonny squadrons hurled themselves upon the confused and disorderly groups of galloping Cossacks.

The pursuit of the two Mamontov divisions went on till broad daylight. Bodies in blue Cossack tunics, and breeches with a red stripe on the seams, lay about the fields by the thousand, terrified riderless horses galloping among them.

By dinnertime Budyonny's troops formed a large camp on the plain, crowding round the solid copper field kitchens seized from the enemy. In them was steaming the usual millet gruel with a lump of lard in it, but now it also contained macaroni, rice, beans, corned beef and whatever else the cooks thought an improvement.

After they had eaten their fill, the men began smoking and boasting of their trophies—a cavalry sword with a silver hilt, a Japanese carbine, a Don horse—a chestnut with white spots and the traditional white patch on its head.

Far from subsiding, the excitement of battle increased. Everywhere was the sound of accordions being played. Voices roared out: "The clouds, the clouds hang over us, a mist is on the fields. . .", and other voices took up the refrain. Here and there a dancer, hurling himself into a squatting position, beat out a rapid tattoo on the ground with his heels, his legs

shooting back and forth, his arms thrown in and out in swanlike movements, to the thrumming of the balalaika and whistling of onlookers. But hark! The bugles ring out once more, calling to battle and hard work again. Budyonny in his Cossack cloak and cap of silvery Astrakhan, rode slowly past in the distance, accompanied by both his divisional commanders. And once more the regiments formed, the eight red banners swaying and fluttering in their midst.

The terrible rout of their first column and the frustration of their original plan made the Whites give up the idea of encircling Budyonny, who was not slow to profit by the enemy's confusion. Next morning, at dawn, Budyonny's men attacked the second Mamontov column, which also, unable to sustain the impact, was obliged to retreat towards the railway, under cover of an armoured train, clattering noisily over the bridges from Voronezh. Beneath its steel turrets, artillery officers stood by the 6-inch guns and machine guns, peering into the slowly thinning mist. Every now and then a signalman appeared on the line ahead, waving a flag, and the train stopped for a moment to receive information. It was thus that they learned of the desperate state of the second column, forced back to the railway by Budyonny's troops.

The armoured train gathered speed, its hoarse whistle rent the air incessantly, promising speedy relief to Mamontov's men.

The gunners, looking through the loopholes in the turret, discerned a vague form in the mist, rushing over the tracks to meet the armoured train. Slowing down, the engine driver slammed on the brakes and reversed, and the gunners opened fire on the shadowy form, which was rapidly increasing in size. But it was too late. A huge goods engine, with nobody in it, crashed full steam ahead into the steel-plated front carriage of the armoured train. The engine was crammed with dynamite front and sides. There was an explosion. The shells in the front carriage of the armoured train instantly exploded, too. The carriage upended in a vortex of earth, sand, flames, smoke, and steam, and turned over, dragging with it the whole length of the marvellous steel tortoise, as it rolled down the embankment.

Mamontov's second column fled towards Voronezh. The third column withdrew in the same direction, without firing

a shot; but on the fourth day of this unprecedented carnage it was forced to accept battle and was routed, strewing the fields and hillocks for miles around with the slaughtered bodies of Cossacks.

The battered Don and Kuban divisions—some of their regiments had lost half their strength—crossed to the other side of the river. In the early morning of the twenty-fourth, Budyonny's main forces followed them there. The wooden bridge, formerly guarded by the priests' detachment and Teplov's cadets, was abandoned—there had been no time to blow it up. Several batteries were firing from the town, raising columns of mud and water. . . . Budyonny rode up to the bridge, which he discovered to be a jerry-built affair. Sending for the musicians with the silver bugles, he ordered them to cross over to the other bank and play the gayest, most stirring tunes they knew—marches and dances. The conservatoire students, still in the outgrown coats with the red-and-yellow tabs they had been wearing when captured, ran over the bridge, and got to the other side just as a shell blew it up. Half dead with fear, they blew blasts on their silver trumpets to the roar of the explosion.

Every mounted Red Army man was given a shell to carry across in his hands. "Forward!" cried the commissars and commanders, rushing ahead of the squadron into the icy water, which seethed and splashed with bursting shells. When they reached the middle of the river the men slipped off their saddles, and swam, each holding on to his horse's mane with one hand, and bearing the shell in the other. Gun teams plunged into the angry flood, dragging the guns along the river bed. Once on the other side, Budyonny's men, dripping and fierce, rushed on their soaking steeds to the attack of Voronezh. But Mamontov's and Shkuro's divisions would not accept battle here, either, and hastened to cross the Don in the direction of Kastornaya.

The annihilation of the best White mounted troops and the occupation of Voronezh constituted one of the initial stages in the vast strategic plan drawn up by the new command of the Southern Front.

Copies of this plan, typed on bluish paper and signed by Stalin, were sent to all army commanders, commanders of corps, divisional commanders, brigade commanders and regimental commanders.

It made detailed provision (perfectly practicable, and couched in language comprehensible to every Red Army man) for the operations of all units on the Southern Front, starting from the district of Orel and Kromi, from where Denikin's battered guards, headed by General Kutepov (he who had once vowed to be the first to break into Moscow), were retreating beneath the assaults of a special group commanded by Sergo Orjonikidze. Provision was also made for operations in the Voronezh and Kastornaya district, where Budyonny's corps had been set the task of bisecting the White front at the juncture of the Don and Volunteer armies, and occupying Rostov-on-Don, the way to which lay through the breach formed across the proletarian Donbas, with its mining population.

The Bolsheviks, who had seemed to be at their last gasp, had achieved the impossible, and brought off, despite typhus epidemics, famine and economic collapse, a triumphant counteroffensive, thereby frustrating world plans for the strangulation of Red Russia, that boundless country still such an enigma to the outside world, and astonishing everyone. For everyone was taken by surprise—from travellers sitting on their suitcases in dingy hotel rooms, secure in the conviction that the French would be in Moscow by the New Year, bringing with them champagne, oysters, and perhaps even Parma violets, to the gentlemen inured to cooling their heels for hours on end in the anteroom of the Ruler of Europe, but who now marched, their heads held high and Constitutional Russia almost in their pockets, straight into Clemenceau's office, where the flames crackled in the fireplace, and the little, round-shouldered dictator, his beetling, grizzled brows bent over a plan for tomblike tranquillity on a world scale, rose and yielded his gnarled fingers to the ecstatic pressure of the Russian. But no one was more astonished than Anton Ivanovich Denikin, who had long stopped playing *vint* on Fridays, and who, though a frail mortal like everyone else, had begun to believe he had a divine mission.

The very sources of inspiration of the Russian people were a mystery. The idea of universal happiness and a just social order, which people thought had been buried for ever beneath the corpses piled mountain-high in the world war, had dropped, like seed from a tree in the garden of Eden, into poverty-stricken, devastated Russia, where illiterate peasants

were still telling one another fairy tales about Ivan the Fool, witches and flying carpets, and where old blind men and women sang their slow, long-drawn epics about the battles, feasts and weddings of the bogatyr.

Among the peoples inhabiting Russia the idea acquired the strength and flexibility of a steel blade. The peasants who told fairy tales, the workers from the broken-down factories, with their tall chimneys long cold, wrestling with famine, typhus, and economic collapse, were routing and pursuing Denikin and his first-rate army, had stopped Yudenich's shock troops at the very gates of Petrograd, hurling them back upon Estonia, had overcome and scattered over the Siberian snows the vast army of Kolchack, capturing and shooting the ruler of all the Russias, beating back the Japanese in the Far East, and, inspired by the ideas of Lenin, and by ideas alone—for there was nothing to eat and nothing to wear in Russia—believed themselves to be stronger than all the rest of the world, believed that they could build up, on the ruins of their impoverished state, a just communist society in the near future.

* XX *

Katya felt as if by now her stomach must be no bigger than a tiny purse. There was only room in it for two ounces of bread, a bite of boiled salt fish and a few spoonfuls of soup. Skirts were just a nuisance—she could hardly keep them on, and she had neither thread to take the waist in with, nor time to sew. Her eyes, on the other hand, had become twice as big as they had been in the autumn, when Matryona had fed her on rich batter and dough.

The little girls at school sometimes said to her, wrinkling their hungry mouths in a sudden gush of feeling:

"How pretty you are, Auntie Katya!"

This caused Katya pleasure, for all her life was in the future. The one souvenir of the past—the emerald ring with its tiny green flame—had been lost long ago, in Vladimirskeye. She no longer called to memory the beloved shades peopling the dilapidated house on Starokonyushenni Street. But the future, towards which were directed all the hopes and thoughts of a people tormented by hunger, cold, deprivation and war, presented itself to Katya's mind as a broad high-

way, glistening like glass in the sunshine, on either side of it green meadows and misty lakes surrounded by clumps of trees, holding up their branches to the sun. The road led to a distant, bluish city—intricate, luxurious, exquisite—in which all would find happiness.

One day Katya talked to the children about this during a lesson. They listened with bated breath. It appealed to a sentimental streak in the girls that the road to the future wound its way through green meadows, where they could chase butterflies and pick bunches of tiny, starry flowers. The boys found the story unsatisfactory—Katya had said nothing about trains tearing all over these meadows, past signals, over girder bridges, through tunnels, had not mentioned the colossal chimney stacks from which the smoke would roll so merrily. All were agreed that the city of the future was, of course, blue, with houses touching the very clouds, with incredibly fast trams, with swings on all the boulevards, and booths giving out bread and sausage. "What about ices?" asked Katya. But it appeared that none of the children had ever tasted an ice, or if they had, it had been when they were very little, and they could not remember what it was like.

Katya was obliged to husband her strength. One day, when carrying a full pail into the yard, she had suddenly felt she could hold it no longer, and had had to put it down and lean against the wall to overcome her dizziness. Fortunately nothing had come of the lectures on art: Moscow was getting emptier every day—you might walk from Arbat Square to Strastnoi Square without meeting a single passer-by. But every day now there were bulletins in *Izvestia* announcing military victories. The Red Armies were pouring in a broad stream into the Donbas through the breach in the front at Kastornaya, and peasant risings were rife in the rear of the Whites. At last the end of war and disaster was in sight.

Katya was sitting in her room one evening. Though it was nearly eight she had not lit the night light, for the freshly-kindled "bumblebee" sent enough light through its small half-open door. Seated before it on a low stool, Katya cautiously fed it splinters of wood, which burned up brightly and crackled gaily, being composed of that solar energy Katya had told the children about at school.

She was reading *Crime and Punishment*. Heavens, how hopeless life had been then! Her hand on the pages of the

book, Katya gazed into the flames. How terrifying that night spent by Svidrigailov in the wooden tavern on Bolshoi Prospect! It was that very restaurant at which Katya had once been—only once in her life—with Bessonov. Perhaps it had been the very room in which Svidrigailov had passed hour after hour in hopeless procrastination, knowing that he would never overcome his horror and disgust of life.

This curse had been broken, burned, dispersed. And now one could sit calmly reading about the past, putting splinters into the fire, and believing in happiness.

Uneven steps tramped along the passage—probably people coming for a consultation with Maslov again. All sorts of people had been coming to him lately at nightfall—their angry voices even reached Katya's room. However late their visits ended, Maslov, after seeing them to the kitchen, would knock cautiously at Katya's door.

"You haven't gone to bed, have you? You ought to be ashamed—flopping down so early . . . and you a modern woman. . . . Oh, oh!"

He would rattle the doorhandle insistently, causing Katya to tremble with indignation. Maslov was obstinate and abnormally vain—he was capable of standing outside the door till the morning.

"Ekaterina Dmitrevna, I only want to sit quietly beside your stove . . . my nerves are in rags. . . . Let me in—be a good comrade. . . ."

It would have been absurd not to respond, and in the end Katya always opened the door. He would sit in front of the "bumblebee" and put in chunks of wood, each chunk worth its weight in gold. Chuckling mysteriously, he would stretch his narrow hands towards the red-hot iron, and embark upon a long harangue on the cosmic power of sexual attraction. . . . Beauty consisted in succumbing to this attraction—anything else was beastly puritanism. Besides, wasn't Katya a beautiful woman, living alone and, as he put it, "not hampered by lodgers." He had an unshakable conviction that one of these days she would let him creep in beneath her blanket. . . .

This particular evening, her head full of Dostoyevsky, Katya could not shut out the dreary sound of the voices from Maslov's room. She could hear furious exclamations, and from time to time there was the sound of falling objects, as

if books were being thrown about. Tonight he was sure to come to her door for consolation again.

There was a scratching on the door, and a little voice came through the keyhole: "Auntie Katya, are you at home?" It was Klavdia, in enormous felt boots, held together by pieces of string.

"Chesnokova wants you to come—Roshchin is there, from the front."

"Is it very cold out?"

"Awful, Auntie Katya. Such a wind—you can hardly keep your eyes open! If only it would snow, but the snow doesn't come . . . what a funny winter! How warm your room is, Auntie Katya!"

Katya was extremely reluctant to go out into the cold and drag herself to Chesnokova's house in the Presnya district, but the thought of the inevitable midnight conversation was still worse. She put on her coat, throwing a warm shawl over her head. Cautiously, so that Maslov should not hear, she went out with Klavdia. The night wind rushed at them from the dark side street with such force that Katya covered the little girl with the ends of her shawl. Dust stung her face, and loose sheets on the iron roofs clattered. The wind wailed and whistled as if Katya and Klavdia were the last people on the earth, and everything had died, and the sun would never rise over the world any more. . . .

Katya turned her back to the wind to rest beside the dimly lit window of a little wooden house. Through a chink in the curtains she could see a cluttered room, a black pipe protruding at a right angle from the fireplace, the flame of a "bumblebee" in the middle of the room, and a few people seated in armchairs. They were all listening, their heads propped on the palms of their hands, to a youth who stood before them, his snub nose held proudly aloft, reading something from a notebook. His shabby coat was open over his bare chest, and his felt boots, like Klavdia's, were bound round his legs with string. His gestures and the romantic way he had of tossing back his thick, unbrushed hair, told Katya that the youth was reading poetry. Her heart warmed to him and she smiled as she turned back to face the wind, and ran towards Arbat Street, still holding the shawl over Klavdia.

There were a great many people in Chesnokova's room—most of them were the wives of workers who had gone to the

front, but there were a few old men, given places of honour at the table, where the new arrival was speaking about military affairs. They were all plying him with questions, interrupting one another—would it soon be easier to get bread? Could a consignment of wood be expected by Christmas? Were felt boots and sheepskins being issued in the units? Husbands and brothers were mentioned by name—were they alive and well?—as if this military man could know by name all the thousands of workers fighting on all the fronts!

Unable to push her way into the room, Katya waited in the passage. Standing on tiptoe she caught sight of the visitor bending a bandaged head over a sheet of paper to write something down.

"Any more questions, Comrades?" he asked, and Katya trembled, as if this quiet, stern voice had entered into her very being and rent her heart. She turned instantly, intending to go away. So nothing had ever been forgotten! The sound of this voice, so like that dear one which was for ever silenced, had aroused her former grief, the old, useless pain. . . . Thus it is that long-forgotten memories come back to the lonely in dreams, and a man sees a strange hut in the forest, lit up by dying embers, and beside them his dead mother, sitting smiling as in his distant childhood: he would like to stretch out his arm towards her, to call her back to life, but he cannot touch her, she smiles silently, and he realizes that it is only a dream, and tears come from deep within him, swelling the sleeper's bosom.

Something in Katya's face made one of the women in the doorway say:

"Citizens, make way for the teacher, we're hemming her in. . . ."

They made way for Katya to go into the room. As she entered, the man at the table raised his bandaged head, so that she saw his stern face. Before joy had time to light up and widen his dark eyes, Katya staggered. Her head swam, and everything became confused in her mind, so that the rising hum of voices retreated and the light began to go dark, like the time when she had almost dropped the pail in the doorway. . . . Smiling guiltily, her breath coming fast, her face turning pale, Katya fainted away. . . .

"Katya!" exclaimed the man at the table, pushing his way through the people. "Katya!"

Many hands seized her, not allowing her to fall. Vadim Petrovich took her drooping face between the palms of his hands—so sweet, so dear, it was, with the chill, half-open mouth, the eyes rolling upwards beneath the lids.

"She's my wife, Comrades, my wife," he said over and over again, with quivering lips. . . .

The wind blew at their backs as they walked. Vadim Petrovich held Katya to him with an arm round her frail shoulders. She cried the whole way, stopping every now and then to kiss him. He had begun to tell her why he had been considered dead, when he had been looking for her all over Russia for a whole year. But it was all so long and confusing, and just now not a bit necessary. Sometimes Katya would exclaim: "Stop, this isn't the way!" and they would turn and roam dark, empty side streets, in which rusty weathercocks creaked on the chimney tops and half-torn sheets of iron rattled on the roofs, while behind a decrepit fence waved the branches of an ancient lime tree, which might have seen the hagridden Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol rush by, with streaming coat tails on just such a night as this.

When they got to Starokonyushenni Street Katya said:

"Here's our house—do you remember it? But you always came by the front door. I'm living in the same room, Vadim."

They scuttled across the tiny yard. The kitchen door was locked.

"Oh, what a nuisance! We shall have to knock. . . . Knock as loud as you can."

Katya laughed, then cried a little, kissed Vadim and laughed again. Vadim Petrovich drummed on the door with his fists.

"Who's there?" asked Maslov anxiously from the other side of the door.

"Open the door, it's me, Katya."

Maslov opened the door, the tin night light with its glass chimney shaking in his hand. Seeing a military man behind Katya, he started back, his cheeks wrinkling into vertical creases, his eyes narrowing with hatred.

"Thank you," said Katya and ran to her room, not letting go of Vadim's hand. When they entered, there was still some warmth left in the room.

"Have you any matches?" whispered Katya.

"Yes," he replied, and he too, in his agitation, whispered.

She lit the lamp, a tiny flame in an empty tin, but quite enough for them to look at one another all night. She unwound her shawl, never taking her eyes off Vadim: he was quite grey, even in his eyebrows there were a few grey hairs; his face was more manly, and wore an expression of stern serenity which was new to her. It was this which charmed her: he was younger, braver, handsomer than the man she remembered in Rostov. Catching sight of his bandage she sighed, her lips parted, emitting a tiny gasp.

"Are you wounded?"

"A mere scratch . . . but it got me a fortnight's leave in Moscow. . . . I knew you were here. . . . But how should I ever have found you?" (She smiled joyously and archly, the corners of her mouth rising.) "I almost found you in that village, you know. . . . I was after Krasilnikov. . . ." (Katya's chin trembled, and she tossed her head angrily.) "I killed him, Katya." (She lowered her eyelids, letting her head droop.) "I was beginning to tell you how it happened that you got news of my death, Katya . . . as a matter of fact, I *did* die. . . ." (Katya looked at him in alarm, and her great eyes filled with tears again.) "I was travelling by train at night—I had nothing more to live for, I had been mistaken about the main thing, I was quite certain I would either be killed, or commit suicide. Forgive me, Katya, it's hard to say it, but I feel I must . . . it was only the thought of you—not love, no, there was no love in me then, but the sheer thought of you, as of a thing which must not be destroyed, cast off, forgotten, which must not be betrayed—that held me back. That night in the train was the wreck of everything in me. . . . Now, when I see familiar faces through my gun sight, I realize the black, devastated soul I am sending a bullet into. . . ."

Katya laid her hands on his shoulders and pressed her cheek to his violently beating heart. They stood there in the middle of the room, he in his unbuttoned greatcoat, she in her outdoor coat. She understood that he was talking of the thing that mattered most of all to him. . . . Dear, wonderful man. . . . He was in a hurry to put himself right in her eyes, so that she should love in him that which was new, honest, austere, passionate. . . . When, in a fit of madness, he had left

her in Rostov, she had known he would suffer keenly and come to understand everything. . . . Pressing herself against him she listened to his words, confused and broken, as if he were hastily jotting down in hieroglyphics his overwhelming spiritual sufferings . . . but Katya would have understood without words. . . .

"It's an immeasurable task, Katya . . . we never dreamed that we would be the ones to fulfil it. . . . Remember all our talks? What a pointless, fatiguing thing we thought the vortex of history, the downfall of great civilizations, ideas which had become pitiful travesties of themselves . . . beneath the dress shirt, the same hairy chest of primitive man . . . all falsehood! The scales have fallen from our eyes, and we see the whole of our past life as nothing but falsehood and crime. Russia brought forth a human being. This human being demanded the rights of man for men. This is no dream, it is the Idea, it is on the points of our bayonets, it is altogether practicable. . . . A blinding light has lit up the half-ruined vaults of past centuries . . . all is logical and natural . . . the aim has been found . . . every Red Army man knows it. . . . Do you begin to understand me, Katya? I want you to have the whole of me . . . my joy, my heart, my beloved, my star. . . ."

Suddenly his embrace became so close that Katya's frail bones seemed to crack, but she only pressed closer to his heart. There was a knock at the door, followed by the voice of Maslov.

"Ekaterina Dmitrevna, can I speak to you a minute. . . ."

Getting no answer, he began, as usual, rattling the door-handle. "You are aware I suppose that the town is under martial law. You have a man in your room after ten o'clock . . . and since I am responsible for the apartment. . . ."

"Wait a minute, *I'll* speak to him," said Roshchin, removing Katya's hands from his shoulders.

"Vadim, don't be mad—let me talk to him . . . I implore you, please, Vadim. . . ."

She went out at once, pulling the door to, behind her. Maslov stood there, grinning, still holding the night light.

"You can't come in, Comrade Maslov," she said firmly—she had never spoken to him like this before.

He began backing away from the door, beckoning to her to follow him, and fixing on her a hysterical gaze. Going after him, she asked:

"Well? What do you want? I don't understand. . . ."

"I want to warn you, Ekaterina Dmitrevna, not to attribute too much importance to my disaster . . . it's no disaster, really . . . of course, you've been told about it . . . there's rejoicing and triumph throughout the district . . . but it's early yet to rejoice and triumph. . . ."

"I don't know what you're talking about," replied Katya angrily. "But kindly don't knock at my door. . . ."

"Don't lie! You know all about it . . . now I know what you are! In the first place—kindly continue to treat me as if my Party ticket had not been cancelled . . . it would be more prudent on your part. . . ." (There was a gurgling in Maslov's throat, though his speech was quiet, even languid.) "Nothing has changed, Ekaterina Dmitrevna! In the second place—your nocturnal visitor will depart this minute. . . . You ask why I insist on this? Here's my answer. . . ." (Putting his hand into a side pocket of his greasy jacket, on which many of the buttons were missing, he took out a flat pistol and held it out on the palm of his hand, for Katya to see.) "And lastly, we will resume our former relations. . . ."

Katya was so shaken that she could only blink. Roshchin gave the door a push and came out of the room.

"What do you want with my wife?"

Maslov's face became a mass of wrinkles, extending from ear to ear, he squatted down to place the night light on the ground, all the time fiddling with the revolver in his other hand.

"Hi, stop that!" said Roshchin. Going up to him he snatched the revolver from his hand and put it into the pocket of his own greatcoat. "I'll hand it in at the district Cheka tomorrow, you can get it back from them. If you come to our door again I'll wring your neck. . . ."

They went back to the room. Katya was silently cracking the joints of her fingers. Roshchin helped her off with her coat.

"It's all as clear as daylight, Katya, and he'll never poke his nose in here again. He must be the Maslov I heard about at the front. He's one of those who tried to demoralize the army."

Removing his greatcoat he sank down beside the armchair in which Katya, somewhat perturbed, had seated herself, and laid his head in her lap. Her hands slid over his hair, cheek

and neck. They had both completely forgotten the absurd scene with Maslov. They were silent. A fresh emotion, powerful, ever new, rose in them with elemental force—in him it was the joy of desiring her, in her, the joy of sensing his joy.

"My love is a thousand times stronger than before, Katya," he said.

"So is mine. . . . But I—always, always, Vadim. . . ."

"Are you cold?"

"No, no. . . . It's just that I love you too much. . . ."

He seated himself beside her in the broad armchair, kissing her eyes, her mouth, the corners of her lips. Then he kissed her breast, and Katya, remembering that there was a mole on her left breast which he used to be very fond of, unbuttoned her woollen blouse so that he could kiss it.

The stove really had got cold, and it was freezing in the room. Vadim, constantly glancing at Katya, exposing his even teeth in a smile, squatted down before the "bumblebee," blowing on the embers and adding blocks sawed from the legs and backs of a mahogany armchair. The room became warm once more. Katya blushed as she undressed, and he laughing, took her face in his hands and kissed it.

The wind howled in the chimney all night, making the iron roof rattle loudly. Katya got up several times, like Psyche, to trim the lamp, never taking her eyes off the face of the sleeping Vadim. She was brimful of joy and knew that he, too, was full of joy, and that it was this which made his face so calm and grave.

"Katya, Katya!" cried Dasha, bursting into the kitchen. "Katya! My own Katya!" she shouted again, stamping along the passage in her frozen felt boots. She fell upon Katya, seized her, kissed her; then she held her at arm's length, gazed at her passionately, and again fell to squeezing and stroking her. She brought with her a smell of snow, of sheepskins, of black bread. She was in a sheepskin jacket, and a peasant woman's shawl, and there was a bundle at her back.

"Katya, my darling, my dear one, my sister. . . . Oh how I've longed for you, dreamed of you. . . . Just think—we had to walk all the way from the Yaroslavl station. Moscow's like a village: silence, crows, snow, footpaths trampled out in the streets . . . such a distance! My legs are almost giving way. . . . And Kuzma Kuzmich carried two poods of flour . . .

we got to Starokonyushenni Street, and then I couldn't find the house! We went up and down the street three times from end to end. . . Kuzma Kuzmich said it was the wrong street. . . I was simply frantic—how could I have forgotten the house! And all of a sudden . . . just fancy! A man appears round the corner—a military man. I went up to him: 'Excuse me, Comrade. . . ' And he stared at me with all his eyes . . . my jaw dropped and I sat right down in the snow . . . it was Vadim! I thought I must have gone mad . . . the dead walking about the streets of Moscow . . . and he laughed like anything and started kissing me . . . and I couldn't get up. . . . Katya, my pretty one, my clever darling . . . why, we have enough to tell each other to last us ten nights. . . . Good heavens, now I remember the room! There's the bed and there's the medicine chest with the Sirens. Vadim's been telling me about Ivan. A hospital train will be leaving for their unit in a few days, and I've decided to join it. I'll go as a nurse and Anisya and Kuzma Kuzmich will go with me . . . we won't leave him here alone, he might get into trouble. . . . We're simply dying for something to eat, Katya. . . . Do put the kettle on! And then we must have a wash. . . . We were a whole week in a goods van coming from Yaroslavl . . . we must take off all our clothes and search them thoroughly. . . . We won't come into your room yet, we'll stay in the kitchen. Come on, I'll introduce you to my friends . . . what marvellous people, Katya! I owe them my life—everything! We'll heat up the range ourselves and boil the water, there's a whole lot of furniture in there. . . . Haven't you got a single grey hair, Katya? For goodness' sake—you look ten years younger than me. . . . I'm sure the day will come—soon, soon, when we shall all be together. . . ."

In Moscow, oats were being given on ration cards. Never before had the capital of the Republic gone through such a hard time as in the winter of 1920. The Red Army offensive had swallowed up all available manpower. The grain and coal reserves seized from the Whites had rapidly melted away. The rich provinces which had been overrun by Cossacks and Volunteers were devastated. The workers' food detachments could only find the most insignificant grain surpluses there.

On the anniversary of the Frost Campaign the Volunteer Army fell back on Novorossiisk, strewing the impassable mud of the Kuban steppe with abandoned baggage carts, mud-logged guns, and dead horses. All was over. Anton Ivanovich Denikin, grey-haired and stooping, had sailed away on a French torpedo boat to live the life of an émigré and write his memoirs. The pitiful remnants of the Volunteer regiments were shipped to the Crimea. The Don and Kuban Cossacks had at last realized that they had been cruelly deceived, and had paid for their obstinacy with the nameless graves dotting the steppe from Voronezh to Novorossiisk.

It was still winter in Moscow. The March tempests had piled up the snow in drifts. All the palings and all the furniture that could be spared had long ago been burned up in the "bumblebees." Plants and factories were at a standstill. Office employees sat in the various departments huddled up in their coats and blowing on their swollen fingers to enable themselves to hold their pencils—the ink was frozen hard in the inkwells, and would not thaw out till the warm weather came. People walked slowly, never parting with their rucksacks, and there were few who could walk from their houses to their work without stopping to rest against a snowdrift on the way, or turning into some gateway sheltered from the wind. The hunger was appalling—people dreamed of boiled sucking pig on a dish, a sprig of parsley stuck in its grinning mouth, and, dreaming chewed the empty air, imagining they were munching fat ham and hard-boiled eggs. But minds were in a ferment: the stubborn, bloody, strangling monster of counterrevolution had been destroyed, life was following an upward trend, only a few more months of want and suffering, and there would be bread again and the demobilized Red Army would be engaged on peaceful labour—the restoration of what had been destroyed, and the building up of that new life in which all the sufferings, the bitterness of centuries of oppression, would be forgotten. . .

Dasha's wish had come true—they were all together once again. Ivan Ilyich and Roshchin, having got short leave, travelled in Dasha's hospital train to Moscow, arriving on a bleak March morning, when grey clouds were rolling over the town, the snow was slipping off the roofs, huge icicles

dropping, and the heavy fragrant air seemed fraught with restlessness.

Katya met them. Vadim Petrovich, who, from the carriage window, saw her first, jumped off the train before it stopped. Katya, her eyes, her smile, her entire being, radiating joy, ran to meet him through the smoke from the engine enveloping the iron pillars. She seemed to him even sweeter than on the day of their meeting in December. The whole of their love life was in these brief meetings. They moved aside at once, and stood under the clock. But the jealous Dasha dragged her Telegin up to them. She simply had to hear her sister go into loud raptures over Ivan Ilyich.

"Do look at him, Katya. . . . Hasn't he changed? There was something unfinished in his face in Petersburg. . . . His eyes are quite different, too. . . . Forgive me, Ivan, but that time we went to Samara on the steamer, you had such light-blue eyes, they were even a tiny bit stupid, and it worried me a tiny bit. . . . Now they're like steel. . . ."

Ivan Ilyich stood before Katya, and sighed gently from sheer emotion. Katya, too, found him extremely attractive—there was something familiar, calm and steady about him.

"And if you want to know what sort of a man he is—just listen to this: all through the campaigns—just think!—even when he was pursuing Mamontov on horseback, he carried in his saddlebag—guess what? A little china kitten and puppy he gave me the day of our second wedding in Tsaritsyn . . . because, you see, I was very fond of them. . . ."

Kuzma Kuzmich, jumping out of the carriage, ran up to Katya. He took her hand in both his, and shook it long, his red clean-shaven face shining with pleasure and devotion; he was so sleek and fat in his white surgeon's coat that the gaunt passers-by on the platform looked at him with dislike. . . .

"In those few days I got as fond of you as I am of Darya Dmitrevna, Ekaterina Dmitrevna," he said. "I always say no women are so charming as Russian women . . . emotionally honest, self-sacrificing, loving love, but courageous when necessary. . . . Always at your service, Ekaterina Dmitrevna. . . . I'll do what I have to do, and look in about the middle of the day, I've brought a few things from Rostov. . . . It's spring there. . . . But somehow the North is closer to one's heart. Well—I must be off. . . ."

Anisya then came up, she, too, in a white coat. There was

disappointment in her great eyes: she had hoped to stay in Moscow after this run, but the senior doctor—and really it was very un-Soviet of him!—would not hear of it. “What d’you want with dramatic schools? There’ll be great battles again soon, and we shall have masses of wounded . . . I won’t let you go!”

“Oh, well, I shall have to wait till the autumn,” she said to Dasha, wiping her nose on the end of her kerchief. “But the years are passing, I’m losing one year after another, and it’s too bad. . . . Latugin’s here, he came to meet me at the station, the silly ass! He’s up for the congress—as a delegate. He’s become so proud and serious. . . . He told me he’d been three days running to the station to meet the hospital train . . . he’s gone to try and get the senior doctor to give me a day’s leave. . . . He told me about Agrippina, Darya Dmitrevna. She’s in Saratov, and she’s had her baby, he doesn’t know whether it’s a boy or a girl. She was ill a long time. . . . She’s gone back with her baby to the regiment. . . . Poor thing, she has a difficult nature—can’t love more than once. . . .”

They walked on foot from the station right across Moscow to Starokonyushenni Street, where the room in which Maslov had formerly lived was prepared for Dasha and Telegin. Maslov had been gone two months—first he had taken away his books, then he had disappeared himself. . . . They walked slowly, on account of Katya. Vadim Petrovich would have liked to pick her up and carry her, beneath the ragged spring clouds rolling over Moscow. Telegin and Dasha held back a little, so as not to be in their way.

“I’m worried about Katya,” said Dasha. “Moscow and that school will be the death of her. She has hardly anything to eat. Her skin has become quite waxy in the last three months. . . . She ought to come with us in the train. . . . I would feed her up. . . . She lives on feeling, and that won’t do.”

And Telegin replied, with quiet significance:

“And Vadim is pining away without her, too. . . .”

They were soon overtaken by Latugin and Anisya. She had taken off her surgeon’s coat and her cheeks had become rosy. Latugin, frowning and grave, greeted them in a reserved manner, but drew from the cuff of his greatcoat four guest tickets for the Bolshoi Theatre, in the very top gallery.

"It's worse than being at the front here," he said, dealing out the tickets. "I've had a regular fight to get these.... Luckily the commandant turned out to be one of our sailors from the cruiser *Aurora*.... Mind you're not late, now, it's a very important sitting today. Well, come on, Anisya...."

The faint reddish glow from the hundreds of electric bulbs in the five-tiered auditorium of the Bolshoi Theatre scarcely penetrated the haze of human breath. It was as cold as a tomb. On the vast stage, the wings shut off by canvas arches, was the table of the presidium, a little to the side and not far from the dim footlights. All heads were turned towards the back of the stage, where a map of European Russia, almost the whole surface of which was covered with dots and circles, hung from the flies. In front of the map stood a small man in a fur coat, bareheaded; his hair, thrown back from the great forehead, cast a shadow on the map. He held a long billiard cue in one hand, and now and then, drawing his thick eyebrows together, pointed with the tip of the cue to one of the coloured circles, which immediately flashed out in such brilliant light that the tarnished gilt decorations of the hall gleamed, and tense, gaunt faces, eyes wide with attention, became suddenly visible.

His high voice floated over the tense silence.

"We have trillions of poods of air-dried peat in European Russia alone. We have guaranteed reserves for centuries. Peat is local fuel. Twenty-five times more power can be got from an acre of peat bog than from an acre of forest land. Peat occupies the first place—closely followed by water power and coal—in the solution of the problem of revolutionary construction facing us. A revolution which only conquered on the field of battle and did not at once start putting its theories into practice, would peter out like a gust of wind. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who is seated amongst us, is the inspirer of my today's report, and has created a formula for the development of revolution: Communism is—Soviet rule plus electrification...."

"Which one is Lenin?" asked Katya, looking down from the height of the fifth gallery. Roshchin, who kept hold of her thin hand the whole time, whispered back:

"The one in the black coat—see, he's writing something very quickly, now he's lifted his head and thrown a note across the table . . . that's him . . . and the thin one at the end, with a black moustache is Stalin, the one who crushed Denikin. . . ."

The lecturer was saying:

"Where billions of tons of peat are hidden in the immemorial stillness of Russia, where a waterfall descends, or a powerful river rushes by, we are erecting power stations—veritable lighthouses for communalized labour. Russia has shaken off for ever the yoke of the exploiters, it is our task to illuminate our country with the steady glow of an electric campfire. The curse of labour must become the blessing of labour."

Raising the cue, he pointed to the future power stations, lightly touching the circles standing for the new centres of civilization, and the circles responded by flashing like stars in the dusk of the vast stage. In order to light up the map for these brief moments, the entire energy of the Moscow power station had to be concentrated in the hall, and even in the Kremlin, in the offices of the People's Commissars, all the lamps had been unscrewed, with the exception of a 16-candle bulb.

The people in the auditorium, in the pockets of whose military greatcoats and bullet-riddled tunics were handfuls of oats, issued instead of bread that day, held their breath as they listened to the dizzy but fully practicable prospects of the revolution, now entering on the path of creation. . . .

"He knows what he's talking about," Telegin said quietly to Dasha. "I know him well, it's engineer Krzhizhanovsky. When the war's over I'm going back to the works, I have a few ideas of my own. . . . Oh, Dasha, how I'm longing to get back to work! If they provide a power base like that—there's nothing we won't be able to do. . . . The wealth we possess—you have no idea! If we handle it properly we shall leave America far behind. We're ever so much richer. . . . You shall go to the Urals with me. . . ."

And Dasha answered him:

"And we'll live in a log house, as clean as clean, with drops of resin, and big windows. . . . There'll be a big fire in the grate on winter mornings. . . ."

Roshchin—whispering in Katya's ear:

"Do you realize the significance this gives to all our efforts, to the blood that has been shed, the unknown, silent sufferings....? The world will be rearranged for the common welfare.... Everyone in this hall is ready to give his life for this.... It's not just an idea of mine. They could show you scars and the bluish spots left by bullets.... And this—in my native land, and this is Russia...."

"The die has been cast," said the man at the map, leaning on his cue, as on a spear. "We are fighting at the barricades for our own rights and the rights of the rest of the world—to put an end once and for all to the exploitation of man by man."

22nd June, 1941



TO THE READER

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of A. Tolstoy's trilogy, its translation and design, and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

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